CASTLE

(an epic drama in Two Parts)

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PART ONE
THE FALL OF THE TROUBADOUR

The Time and Place: somewhere in Europe. Sometime in the Middle Ages.
The interior of a castle, the central room with huge fire place and balcony.
Beyond the castle is the pastoral fief of farm and town.

Characters

AMRIAM-THE KING

MIRELDA-THE QUEEN TO BE

BALDORF/MONTFORT-TROUBADOUR AND REBEL LEADER

GWNFRITH-THE QUEEN'S STEWARD (SENESCHAL)

NUILLY-ADVISOR TO THE KING

EXTRAS:

PEASANT
Two MERCHANTS
MAN
WIFE ONE
WIFE TWO
BARON
EARL

Five Actors can double
AMRIAM, Baron, Man
MIRELDA, Wife
BALDORF/MONTFORT, Merchant
NUILLY, Earl, Merchant Two, Follower
GWNFRITH, Peasant, Wife Two

The play is an amalgam of the Middle Ages. It is not meant to accurately depict the history, such as that of the father and son both named Simon de Montfort to whom it refers. It creates a myth-time from pieces of the past.

(Where possible, make use of the aesthetics of the medieval: the Tres Riches Heures, the illuminated manuscripts, the jousts, the thick candles, wrought iron, tapestries, rich velvets and fabrics, and the music of this incomparable era.)
{ } means Optional

CASTLE is a duology. PART TWO could be performed after a dinner break or long intermission, or on the following evening even as have been Angels in America, Cider House Rules, Coast of Utopia and other works in parts.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Outside the castle are bonfires of Samhain.
Enter GWNFRITH and MIRELDA

GWNFRITH (TO MIRELDA)

See how on the fields the bonfires of Samhain are set high to scare the spirits in their haunts, and here at dusk begin to match their flames to those the sun decrees. He is come here who is renowned as a player, Baldorf. A sweet man, a farmer of flowers and fruits, a player of instruments; in whom the ladies do delight, Apollo-like, a clear eye, a tasty word upon his tongue; a hunter of meat and fowl; a shearer of sheep; the keeper of the king's harts. A strong and well-graced lad. Made for chivalric love. He who is the king's warden hath chosen to live simply in a hut, though he is a baron's ward. He wears his bells upon his ankle for the sheep.

MIRELDA

{I wot to keep not solely fox away from lambs, but to
evil shades dissuade.}
I do recall his countenance.
Though we live across the river; and this Baldorf at another outlier. I know his reputation as a troubadour, and have seen him distantly, a bright planet to conjunct once in a year or so with earth; he quite eclipsed my heart.

(Heraldic trumpet announces BALDORF who enters.)

GWNFRITH

I know your name, both by repute and by the pennants shown beyond as he of Guillmes. Let me inform my liege, and bring him down from maps.

BALDORF

Is this the Queen to be?

GWNFRITH

She is that honored princess.

MIRELDA

We did meet once at market as the mummers played. You were a Morris Man.

BALDORF

I too have seen you, near your father's house. Your face struck me there. Like a raven molted, I could not move but caw, and once again may lose my callow song, like a field left fallow, or tallow mellowed, done.

MIRELDA

You know my sire?

BALDORF

I do, and am in certain ways his messenger.

MIRELDA

Wil't excuse me, as here comes the king.
And I wist the men have private things…

(MIRELDA exits up to the balcony to her chambers. AMRIAM enters from a different place.)

BALDORF

It is Samhain, all Hallowe's eve tonight, and yon the king and queen of coming winter make their trail of sport. Hear their bells and cymbals. I have brought corn to feed the mice that they wilt leave the wheat alone.

AMRIAM

What news of the realm bringeth thee?

BALDORF

(kneels to the king)

I would, as the warden of the woods appointed by you, and as a troubadour who sometimes sings your halls and wanders to the others too, speak with you of plight.

AMRIAM

Speak.

BALDORF

The froizzon failed, and desperate men do seek pannage within your warden's woods to feed their kine. Michaelmas has past, and with it quartering rent too dure, which vassals high and low will hope surcease of at the Yule.

AMRIAM

What then, are the short stout men poaching acorns for their families, Baldorf, when they have not milk enough from goats?

BALDORF

I am your warden and must report:
Some lords would remit many of the oaken glades to those who till your land to bales. Let serfs at times take with their arrows and their snares your stock: the rabbits plentiful upon the fields, and deer and boar within the woods, as well as acorns plentiful.

AMRIAM

They would plunder these reserves and sport would be no more.

BALDORF

Your tables are full up; I see the butter and the breads, the cheese and meats, the wines and cardamom and cinnamon.

BALDORF CONT.
You have enough. More candles than the Orient to melt up night. Those whom you tax to keep your knights supplied (both low and high allied) would keep some harvest for themselves.

AMRIAM

And do. I know they hoard.

BALDORF

I do not suggest, sire, but merely report what they afar, desire. Those you tax most dure at the outliers, the marches, must press your wishes upon their cottagers' backs. Neither earl nor his villein takes comfort in giving too much up for King's nor Popes nor distant wars.

AMRIAM

It is for my knights at the Crusades in part I press rents from the rest.

BALDORF

Your knights keep spoils for themselves as you have said.

AMRIAM

I know how soldiers keep their loot, and it is not by largesse to their cothars…else they would not risk their lives afar.

BALDORF

Then as a chivalrous man I say that those at home should share in bounty we have taken; that none need go unfed; that all be taken care of; that is just, in what you call a God.

AMRIAM

God? You n'er were much for him. The monks shun you for your abstinence from church.

BALDORF

Tis true, I'd rather make a song on Sundays in a secret copse, and play the nymphs. But I am by thee bounden to report:
Wives stock their drying bins for the hard months when they card, and husbanding little, worry in their sleep, whilst husbands grow unvirile in self-blame. The tithes bear heavily upon us, worse with the poor harvest.
We can gain only so much from the land by our backs/ to give to you. When the seasons and rain fail the seed, no matter what our strength, we are paupered.
You see them straining at the axe and bale, shearing the sheep and carding, dyeing; and drying herbs and harvesting the wheat, day in day out until they bend upon their mortal time in gnarls, with no pleasure left in them and they the trees cut down for wood you do protect.

AMRIAM

What do they say? Tell me without guile.

BALDORF

The peasants say:
I serve you as a vassal that I may eat, have plow land upon your fief, yet would wish it otherwise; I would be free, and own this land and be quit of tithes.
Yet to feed my family I bow down and grovel who wilt someday uprise.

AMRIAM

Then my lord knights and I will press them down.

BALDORF

I wouldst repeat for your own safety: The lords whom you tax farthest from your keep must in turn press tithes upon their sheep; and both together turn on thee to right injustice. Beware, injustice breeds contempt.

AMRIAM

You are bold to speak so freely.
Do they uprise, those discontented at my out-liers?

BALDORF

Rest content, their loyalty is thine in admiration and in fear. But they would form a council that you hear just grievances.

AMRIAM

A court for jesters is a council. I am the king.
Not equal to other men.
Power is for itself an end; all men bend to it and…to keep safe, to let their offspring eat, come in with it and compromise. If you let men go their ways, they will be all of greed and each will eat the other, till we, like fabled Erysychthon do devour ourselves. I keep order as does any king. Allow them guilds and commerce, riches /and the liberty to do as they would choose, and none will any have. All will lose.

BALDORF

You and I know right from wrong, and none should profit off the other's back when he is strong, and generosity is strong; give everyone enough to satisfy and you will be the ruler they love better than themselves. Beneficent, like the falcon who prey releases to the hand that holds him gloved.

AMRIAM

I have no need of love from those I rule.
Who are you to priest me thus?

BALDORF

I am guested in your house.

AMRIAM

A guest who threatens kings with uprisings?
Would you aspire to lead the lowly in revolt, or bring the Baron Guillmes' allies 'gainst me?

BALDORF

I know my place beneath your chair; I wouldst constrain an endless grasp for thy own good.

AMRIAM

Give me the names of those who are displeasured at my rule?

BALDORF

Nay.
I often cast my lot with jerkined friends who feed me, and sometimes meat they poach by hunger's prod will share with me, a rabbit, or a corn-hen feast beyond the home fed pig.

AMRIAM

Then feast you not with the good mighty?

BALDORF

I do as I sing their tables.
Thus high nor low would speak to me again were I to report their names. If you seek the light of news from me, let me remain unsinged by the flame of bare betrayals! I am no spy.

AMRIAM (thinking about it)

My warden fails at his job if you eat poachments.

BALDORF

I do you justice at the post, but in truth, judge each unlawful act by what its cause may be.

AMRIAM

Each offense my warden, should bring the sheriff hence. No more have mercy on the rabitters; this pinching affects you not.

BALDORF

Yea, even I am poorer in my free-holdings.
I love the land as they, the low-born do, and live from it.
It is my own cause I plead in pleading theirs, and of behest of them, a boon entreat of you, that you do at least
halve the rents for New Years; let the green bough of prosperity be this year's crop, my liege.

AMRIAM

Why take on a cause which is not fair, thy own?

BALDORF

Here in the book of days, they have their seasons, these ones which I enjoy. A simple life is full of pleasantry but only for free men.

AMRIAM

Forsooth, you are righteous to the wrong cause. For I am God's delegate on earth, and must show His force.

{What care you for these peasants? From Advent to Candlemas, from Michaelmas to Stephens Feast, these peasants by the saints have one hundred days release from work to fete.}

Why be a farmer when ambition is an open road for those well born?

Why not fight, and thus win yourself more lands and be a lord o'er men yourself? Go beyond my warden and knight become. The best lie not at our feet, beasts that those be.

BALDORF

Your Christ lodged with the beasts in hay.

I am not of your army, but for myself and the concealing woods journeying where the faeries wait.

Nor does ambition tempt me when I have enough.

{I am that simple man.

I need no more to pleasure me than my hearth and acres planted by my hand, created green and turned beyond to feed me. These walls imprison me. I have no lust for more of them.}

AMRIAM

Let thee not speak this more or I wilt think thee a usurper: Keep government to me, and song to thee.

Here you have need of sustenance; take draughts and succor at my table and let us end this argument.

You are called here to enhance the eve's festivities; stick to your harp and leave the rule to me.

I will send men into the long lands to root out wolves in the marsh, and quell this discontent, and owe you a service for reporting it.

I would not take poachments more, Baldorf, but prosecute the baggers and hang them by their thumbs, or be relieved of wardening and shamed.

(a few beats)

BALDORF

(As he lifts his tankard to the king)

They say we might be cousins, even brothers by a different dam.

AMRIAM

I have heard this, too, since your first years. Your parentage, your true father, said, he was a mystery; the Baron Guillmes's wife knew you like a Moses, by the river in a blanket swaddled up.

BALDORF

Your father was a wanderer 'mongst women who took the nuptial night's prerogative to heart.

AMRIAM

Causing much resentment for his ways, a wonder he was not assassinated by an angry swain.

BALDORF

People pushed will overstep the common law…

AMRIAM

We spoke of you before his death. He would not confess your parentage. Yea, my father might have made you by his loins. You look enough belike me though different of complexion; where I am stocky as a warrior fit with back must be, you are still thin. I know the cudgels and the arts of horse and hunt, whilst you remain untrained.

BALDORF

Nay, not untrained, the baron gave me knightly lessons I well-heeded; I am unblooded, that is all.

AMRIAM

Play me a tune? Hath viol, timbrels, gemshorn,
shawm, rebec, dulcimer, recorder and tambors sweet amongst your jongleurs without? Then engage them to my ears beyond the balcony so the meet sounds may drift down to us as if from heaven.

(With a sign beyond the stage, BALDORF does so, and we hear but do not see the players.)

AMRIAM

Light the candles, the darkness comes on fast. You'll stay to fete with song my affianced?

BALDORF

I will.

AMRIAM

She enters now. Mirelda from the march afarthest; almost in another kingdom bordered.
Her father baron is impoverished and my land grants will ally him with me, yet against his pride.
Is she not a wight alight with fairy light?

BALDORF

What dowry does she bring for you to sip at such unblighted springs?

AMRIAM

From her mother's side a wealth of myrrh and tapestries. She is a bird's wing, aloft in grace and form.

(BALDORF, as MIRELDA enters, is once more awe-struck by her brunette beauty.)

BALDORF

This is a gem, an oriental cast to her home-borne features. Is she a Jew perhaps?

AMRIAM

No Jewess that I know of, but an opal set in gold.
Perhaps her father took a concubine from the Saracens as many are wont to do who from the foreign lands return.
Now, do thy fingering task: Play us a tune, one of bold love, enough to make the heart flower in winter's blistering.

(BALDORF, takes his harp from his back begins to play. MIRELDA and BALDORF can't keep eyes off each other.)

MIRELDA

My king. How doth?

AMRIAM

Well. Seeing you at hand.
Wouldst introduce thee to the music maker by name--that thou mayst to thine ears attune him. His name be Baldorf, Mirelda. Ask him to play what e'er thee wist.

MIRELDA

As this be Samhain, I may question you beyond your songs.

(From a chest beyond upon which Samhain masks are laying, MIRELDA takes an animal skin and puts feathered wing into her hand.)

MIRELDA

I will put on the right to do so. I would know more of you who playeth with such honey on the ears. Art traveling troubadour who makes love to the ladies and then leaves, or art fit to each castle, to stay on the year?

BALDORF

I am a freeman of the land, the royal warden for the marches near unto the Marsh of Coracles beyond at the bare hills where the stray sheep bah and shepherds sleep in holes with them before they hirsel them to town. That is my border. My home is

there, a small hearth. (I play as they by messenger request me; and I leave the ladies to themselves.)

MIRELDA

No wife to warm your trestle?

BALDORF

None. I am too poor for one. For sheep and song and wheat's corn are all the kitchen garden I can offer her, and no estate, nor wanting one.

MIRELDA

Yet you speak like a gentle born.

BALDORF

My lines are some of each, I wot, good peasant and nobility; fat ankles and thin wrists.

AMRIAM

He is a friend since youth, there is a downy rumor drifting on: some say we may be in half brothers. We ruminate on it each time we meet.

MIRELDA

That is plain enough.

AMRIAM

We differ enough ...

MIRELDA

How so?

AMRIAM

He would stay at home in peace, whilst I would go to war and send knights off to conquer riches for our store, and by ambition and wise planning gather up a fortune to endow my sons and lady with a future for the generations coming.

MIRELDA

You lack ambition?

BALDORF

I lack no thing, and for that I am thankful. I live essential like the Essenes did, though not as fleet and have more shirts.
My guardian is the Baron Guillmes; I know the lists, the horse, the sword-- and the arts of war, as well as courtly graces.

MIRELDA

You've read your bible and your history?

BALDORF

I hold the second as of interest, the first a story for the lambs (bleating and bleak).

MIRELDA

Yet read you do?

BALDORF

Even as I weave. I do what I was taught and sometimes teach it out.

AMRIAM

It is unlawful for the (ruck) (mass) to read, the common men would take the bible for their own sack.

MIRELDA

Where did you read then?

BALDORF

At a monastery where all must go for books.

MIRELDA

Didst take you in?

BALDORF

No man nor woman yet may claim that victory.
A monk was ne'er a faithful man, but I could not be that dishonest at a trade; I could not fake a tonsure with no love of God and so I quit. But read yet when I can. Have monks for cohorts. I feed them trout I've caught; they give me wine they bottle. It works well; this barter is a brotherhood.

MIRELDA

You seem a sanguine rabbit.

BALDORF

I am. And you?

MIRELDA

I am happy when I sport with my young falcons and train them to my arms; or when I ride or walk the birdy woods, or lie in grasses set in perfumed swarms; or thence at these coasts the sea bleats and blasts; when I was a lamb it was the biggest storm of water I ever saw, diminishing every weather and all men—and I did love it always with a heat, all sound and scent of it. Wouldst I an otter, swam it.
I am filled up when I eat this apple, sip this wine, or pluck a rose to twine my hair.

(She goes to a cage and takes out a falcon with his hood, he pecks her gently. Or she simply checks the cage.)

AMRIAM

Or look into the glass, I wager.

MIRELDA

The living is a happy thing, but sometimes how we live is not.

AMRIAM

Enough questions of this minnesinger you bait lest we shall grow impatient awaiting one ourselves, and unfair envy (which we shouldst scorn like unto a peasant at our feet--low born sentiment) bring us down from our position, pinioned.

MIRELDA

Then, I shall ask: why my King did you wait these years to take a bride?

AMRIAM

Dost call me old then, who am but half of your age older?

MIRELDA

I meant no offense.

AMRIAM

Look down at these my villages and holdings, from this high hill to the lowlands and the water.
Here I keep townsmen, farmers, artisans, merchants, Jews and lenders in my thrall with only the church itself a rival to our kingship for tithes for the Pope's wars/ by which this royal sun in part makes greater glory for itself, sharing that imperious light with my bounden knights and lords.
I married not before, for when I was a boy fishing for girls, I enjoyed the dares, and took to chase; I love sport, whether it be the grouse, the coursers for the stag, the conquering of sweet breasts of game precious to my mouth; but I must come into my own like a lion bred to know the purpose is his line, not merely meat.

{(enter GWNFRITH)

GWNFRITH

My lady might I address our King?
Then begging your pardon sire:
There are supplicants without who would see thee; they make complaint that thy bursar impounds too much meat from them. They have sole barrel left and owe the very cooping of it to its maker; they will be left without, their children open mouthed. Shall you benefit them this Hallowe's feast?

AMRIAM

Bring them unto me and I justice will mete.
You will see me merciful as this verse calling for mouths to be nourished reiterates itself refreshed upon his muse.

(He disburses some bags of coins to GWNFRITH for them; she curtsies and exits with the bags. The following with charm:)

Dost approve of this my charity?

MIRELDA

Indeed your grace.

AMRIAM (to Baldorf)

This one who would judge kings?}
And now, let us put on our costumes for the evening's fete.
Await our guests, and dally out upon the evening's fire yet.

(The actors are dressed by GWNFRITH with some animals' skins upon them and animal heads or masks upon them.)

MIRELDA

Now might I guess your fortunes for the coming year, and see their truth at St. Mark's day!

(Fade lights)

Scene 2

Later that night at BALDORF's hut indicated simply on a corner of the stage perhaps by a lit-up backdrop, or a piece of the rounded castle wall turned around to reveal a simple bed and window. BALDORF and MIRELDA have wandered off from the castle, a bit full of mead and harvest wine.

BALDORF

Welcome to my cottage. This is the place from which I love the land, engaging my fingers in the fragrant soil in the spring, satisfied in my creation of the summer corn; yes I grew that, and this, I say at harvesting.

And happy in my competence of warp and weft to wattle and rebuild this place, or hew the chair which now your Lady sits upon like shepherdesses of yore. This is all I have need of and would with you share its gifts.

MIRELDA

It is a coddling croft, a den for a troubadour.

BALDORF

Soon Saint Martin hobbles on his donkey when the sheep are stabled and the pigs are slaughtered for hanging. Though I have more than many serfs, I too am thinned of fat, for his knights take my stores.

Thus have I few biscuits for your sweet tongue, and none of wine.

MIRELDA

Be with me sparse then. I need no food, may live on air this eve with thee.

BALDORF

Know you that this King courting you doth oppress the outlanders, and marches over all their fiefs to steal their lands with mercenary knights and more?

MIRELDA

…when he could be just, he chooses cruelty and sets the peasants on the cross. It is to stay Amriam's grievous oppressions for his fief that my father marries me to him.

BALDORF

I confess my secret and by its baring try on the trust which is the brooch and pin of love: List, I with many men of the land do plot alliances to rise against this man; to go as hawks in storm, or owls o'er the field and pick his mice apart, and redeliver to each one their rightful bounds.

The outliers, such as your sire's e'en, are strong against the king, lest he deplete us. Many of these men ally with others on the lands who princes are, who haughty in their seats would keep their rights and deal fair with those who have them not. These

men would not see gristle made of their days, bloodied by an unfair lord who by his armies and his tax keeps others down.

MIRELDA

Thou hast said you were in part my sire's messenger. Is my father ready to betray his King? If so, why set me out to marry him and by my grace make him to generosity?

BALDORF

Nay, he is loyal, as am I myself, as yet. I am his voice merely
in bringing his land's hardship to the King's ear.

MIRELDA

Then he would not set me in the king's body to dismember him for his sake and the sake of justice?

BALDORF

As yet he kneels to good justice, the fair maid which, by her corn of compassion nourishes all for the best.

MIRELDA

This pleases me. For the king is not a flue of evil yet, who by his greed takes all and then burns his own guilt off to char by killing off his enemies. I cannot hate him.

BALDORF

Yet, this land needs to be unhooded.

MIRELDA

Your cause is righteous but I hope, not rash.
Long have we lived under this man's hand, and his family
before him who owning the stronger horses and the harder hand, hath by force upended us.
Mantling all he holds to himself, barely a blessing at the Yule, he tithes hard so that god and king's houses alone grow richer as he gives himself the hand of God to lead him on by Crusade's rights.
Yet blood will not right injustice, only reason; words, not war; a strong arm gives him girth, but you are too thin for conquest's arts and methinks that Amriam doth power use by
habit, but may within sport a pup's heart which by affection and reason might be trained to better ways.

BALDORF

Council is preferred to war. We are in accord.
{{For that I am melancholic like these notes I play, for I have failed to convince our Amriam with words, and may have instead a goad made to fire up the dues more trying by the Yule quarter.}}
(SOME BUSINESS)
We have jumped through the fiery hoop of Samhain's flame, even as lovers at Midsummer may do. Thus, would I--in your ottery limbs with mine as one enfurred entwine so that we become the world beyond the sun, where meteors burst into rainbows as the world begins-forget the hard hand of kings and tryst doucement with dreams.

(He puts his nose to her nose, looks into her eyes. Picks up an instrument and plays.)

MIRELDA

Might my eyes be as full of planets, and as quick with life and my conscience shine in them alight, a will o' the wisp, for there can be no sin in this.
By the fire under the clear-eyed stars we sleep; and there is nothing but earth to rule us.
I would we sleep innocent together, willow catkins in their pod; and not usurp me with a kiss. For I am too full of mead and harvest wine to keep awake, and know you are a gentle man, will not advantage take.
See the bonfires afar and hear the merriment.
What confection to sleep by until the morrow be All Souls when the ravens' spirits sweep the world clean for winter ice to keep.

(Black Out.)

Scene 3

We hear MIRELDA come back to castle by horse. She enters. It is barely sun up.

AMRIAM (is there onstage)

My betrothed, you are without your chaperone and up at a young time.

(entering:) MIRELDA

Yet there is no seed in the ground today. Icicles are brutal on the trees, and the grass is chimitink with fairy bells of hoar frost timbrels.

AMRIAM

Come in to the fire, and let me take your hawk's cage from off your pillion before he shrinks with chill.
We lost you yester eve, and Baldorf, and your seneschal, and my entourage as well. God knows what stable kept them. I smite myself for losing you; a priceless princess in a king's care should always to the treasure box be confined. We shall not / misplace you hence. Were you cared for as you should be?

MIRELDA

Quite well, thank you, good King. I found a shepherd's hut and I confess, too full with the red new wine, went like the new moon to a blank rest.

AMRIAM

I shall reward him for your care, know you his name?

MIRELDA

I admit I was brute guest, for I asked not, nor am certain of his hut's whereabouts.

AMRIAM

Know you the whereabouts of Baldorf, or of my other guests?

MIRELDA

No, not this hour.

Scene 4

A few days later.

BALDORF and MIRELDA meet outside the castle in a copse.

BALDORF

My man hath sent for thee. Would he were truly my page; I have none, no servants, only friends; none sage…

MIRELDA

And I, a fool have come to tryst. I am to be betrothed at the Epiphany and married at Saint Bride's day…

BALDORF

Quarter day when the first seeds stir? Candlemas; Plough Day, what e'er men call it, tis my doomsday.
I have nothing to offer thee but you have lit me up like the poor servant who spends all his wax tithes on one blaze, or the morning star which brights up the dawn, as other poets sing. What writers and singers speak of love I would requite in you.

MIRELDA

Yes, I love thee! It came up sudden as a summer storm and fain though I would be to quell it, t'was beyond my power; as it refreshed and rained, I rainbowed. But then so what of it? I am duty bound to marry. My father relies on it.
And I have seen love change, the butterfly to its cocoon, ugly in shape; it rots and those who loved no more dote,
And time dissolves them into bitters for their morning draught.

BALDORF

So young to be thus wise.

MIRELDA

My mother and father ended thus, in argument. My mother lost her babies one by one. My father blamed her for their sickliness / and demise.

BALDORF

It is the times. So many sicken, die, how could he have aimed falsehoods at a true woman's heart?

MIRELDA

My father is a gaunt man with a good heart when pinched up. You may have his acquaintance but do you know him well?

BALDORF (indicates No)

So you would marry to leave your father and his ires?

MIRELDA

To leave him well off, and to have a home.
It is too dour an air at Slailey castle. It is a spider's place.
The land is stony, and rents which father makes do not replace his losses. I know what it is to lack a Christmas feast and have bare barley soup.

BALDORF

I could give you that. A spiderless home.

MIRELDA

You may know that I have no dowry.

BALDORF

Save of myrrh and tapestries.

MIRELDA

Do you seek those in your impecunious state?

BALDORF

I will give them away to King Amriam, to take you naked as I am by will of fortune's clothes. Could you bear that?

MIRELDA

You are Apollo Belvedere. Look at you glowing with your lyre; how the gods must envy you and all the goddesses smile and multi-hued birds squabble to alight upon your shoulders.
(Your attraction is the moonlight to the water in which it swims; fluid in motion your limbs are like wheat a ripening, a natural thing. Five planets rare alignments as the ram moon rises. Your little hut more a home to housel me than any I have known, not damp with drafts like stone, but warm and dry and I a lamb to manger. In such an one we could be let to live our love without the courtly intrigue of a king.)

(GWNFRITH is seen by audience watching them and fleeing within to her place from another entry as they turn to enter the castle.)

Ah, King Amriam is gone, come within then, most carefully.

(They enter the castle hall, hiding BALDORF under a tapestry)

Stay concealed.

(to GWNFRITH)

See that there is none about outside the hall.

MIRELDA(to BALDORF)

If he comes, I will affix my hawk on my arm and will say that I called you to mend her jesses or to song me of the news of foreign lands, or marches near my home.
It seems none is about. But let me speak before you enter like an owl from out its tree, unconcealed, undappled, and open to the mobbing birds.
This minds me ill; I have not the heart for deceit; it makes me feel poorer than I am.

You quest for me, it is unwise.

As I am well-born a princess, in my blood if not my fortune, how can I defy my father's law to break with him? Where would we hide? In what country sanctuary trove? Here you are landed, but without land by, how would we live? None would receive me in my own castle homed; I would be cast out, no better than a trull, and penniless.

(She sees a sign from GWNFRITH out the window. GWNFRITH will sneak back in and listen to them unnoticed.)

Come out my hawk and hunt me.

BALDORF

(reveals himself from his hiding place)

Come with me. I have an arm with sure strength, and I am canny like the hawk you curry.

I can perhaps turn war out as well as I do words; it is the same root: a clear head and a hearty, healthy heart. Like Cresside and Troilus we will live as I knight, could I but gain my horses and my armor from the Baron soon.

Have I also an art with power to soothe the hackles of ire, and bring peace to me when I sing—like Orphe' himself, I need only my rebec, harp and shawm, and castles' gates will open unto us. As I am open, under my cloak, so men are ope' with me. Though I have chosen / a plain life, nonetheless I have a coffer of some gold brought by my guardian from the Saracens' wars; I shall be recognized by other princes as a prince, and we will find a roost. For I am owl and nightingale both.

MIRELDA

Yet you will then be bound to me, like sinew to meat, forced to cleave to me for honor's sake, not love; and were you to tire of me I would be of no use, neither to you, nor to myself.

BALDORF

I love you, like the hawk its sky; your heart in me would never die. My heart is a tortoise's, once taken, you might cut me open and it beats for all eternity.

MIRELDA

(Not born well enough, yet too well born: where other women would find lady's keep a waiting)-- yet my heart flies up, I might learn to till the land with you and we like Locksley's outlaws could abandon walls for forests.

BALDORF

I could supply you as the hawk its mistress, with meat from off the land, and we could wander as the lovers in fair legend have, and we could find the mercy in the heart of man to shelter us.

MIRELDA

I could be grown used to living like the winds or weeds.
Yet these luxuries within do tempt me, pearls, and satin, velvet, silks, good spiced meat and mead; but too the feathers and the flowers of the forest ways are good, and I could make a flute of some cold bone, and sing to you!

BALDORF

If we go to the forested hills where no warden dares enter, we could disguise ourselves as shepherds, and bog myrtle brew, or wild bees keep for barter, and in time would be forgot by kings; yet from there I could still foment for a colloquy of common men and lords, all bound in laws.

MIRELDA

But then, we could not leave, lest you abandon your rebellion's justice.

BALDORF

In truth, those lords in opposition to the king might offer us protection; thus we could make bold to flee!

MIRELDA

I hear a sound, a horse is on the path.
Go quickly.

(Enter GWNFRITH)

GWNFRITH

The king, my lady, cometh on his steed, his entourage behind.

MIRELDA

This court is folly.
For what if he, to whom I was once for a moment willingly betrothed doth rumor hear of our entrancement? And how may he not as this town within the castle walls is small enough for gossip out of every house to every ear? And every ear an owl's. What wroth would this make in him? You do endanger both our eyes…

(Exit BALDORF quickly. MIRELDA tries to cover her dismay as Enter AMRIAM, grandly dressed with game in hand; throws it on a table.)

AMRIAM

Dress this brace---most daintily if you please. Food for first winter, Martinmas in a week! Up before the sun, the clouds departed and the arrows shown like meteors into the breasts of these!
You should have joined us.

(GWINFRITH enters again)

AMRIAM

Beyond, the lords and ladies in their trains depart for chambers, and a feast at eve will have together in this hall, of new killed mutton and red winter meat… and winter cold; put more on the fire will you girl, lest her heart grow white with frost?
Here's something for your bother.

(Throws GWNFRITH a coin, she kneels and thanks him)

So then, was your morning fruitful in this wintry castle's stone?

MIRELDA

I did direct as you required the pies and pickling for our Yule betrothal. And my Lady-seneschal, who is now yours as well, has done her share.

GWNFRITH

Many the vat which cooks; th'aromas rise e'en now and the hearth cat hungers for his mouse…

MIRELDA

I would wish you give permission for me to call upon my father's staff to bring more here for these events; we could ride down in half a day, and be returned in time for the festivities.

AMRIAM

I would not let you go, having so recently arrived; the journey is too arduous, as it could blizzard and the cold whiteness ice your passions.

MIRELDA

But it is a brilliant fire in that ice which warms me by so much magic. Look even now the snow begins and peace ascends angelic to her hosts.

AMRIAM

Once gone might go for good.
I will send for what you need.

MIRELDA

There is naught; but thank thee for thy courtesy.

AMRIAM

Then stay castled my rook-tressed princess.

MIRELDA

I wouldst not be locked up too long in walls or I be rooked playing at nine men's Morris or tamping the psaltery, drawing or being told a tale; I need the fields beyond the halls, the secret trails / where the grass may let me lie, and picnicking I spy a stoat gaming a butterfly, or other creatures charming in their play.
This winter always is so long and tapestries are not enough.

AMRIAM

Then I shall let thee wander within reason with thy seneschal--but would not lose you again.

MIRELDA

If you will excuse me I will myself bring these grouse below to your fair cooks, for I have a recipe wondrous in temptation to confer to them!

(She exits)

AMRIAM

What have you gleaned? I see a bright eye and a poised beak ready for sweet meat.

GWNFRITH

Baldorf was here. He would elope with her.

AMRIAM

And she?

GWNFRITH

She was unsure.

AMRIAM

Unsure? When a lord of vast lands requests her heart? She is nigh betrothed with her consent but e'en without consent as is the father's custom she will marry me; but why hath she no love?

GWNFRITH

Anger will not groom love. Soothe her hackles instead, make her forget the other. All women can be wooed. Claim her and she will sit curled beneath your mantle.

AMRIAM

To claim her I must undo him.

GWNFRITH

And if I help, what will make alms to my poor soul for a betrayal of my mistress?

AMRIAM

I will set you up a lady on your own, and never will a baron or an earl be-tithe your family again; they will be freed men to barter as they please. I understand you have an elder brother artisan, good with the cobble and the awl?

GWNFRITH

Tis true. But cannot sell his shoes for fear of those repressions against guilds; though cert he is no member.

AMRIAM

Guilds, were I to let them flourish, they would grow against me. I must restrict the making and the trade to those I license, but yes, your brother would be made villein. You see, I know how to be grateful.

GWNFRITH

Then it could be done.
And there is more poured into my owl ears.

AMRIAM

What more?

GWNFRITH

He plots against thee.

AMRIAM

I have some knowledge of it; but would know more. Can you bring proof of treason or are these rumors fit by envious swains to net a rival?

GWNFRITH

I have no proof but will hang my ears to gain thy favor and do my duty as your vassal.

AMRIAM

…and(I dare not ask lest I must hang my bride's head before a consummation) Mirelda, too?

GWNFRITH

Would stay his hand, but for his own sake, not for love of you.

AMRIAM

Get thee to the kitchens and relieve her. I will give my downy falcon pretty meat.

(Some business until MIRELDA enters)

AMRIAM

Then did you miss me?
I who have in an hour come to love you more than the blizzard loves to cover ground? Each hour gone, my memory enhances thee with perfume, and I would drape you in't.

(Comes toward her)

MIRELDA

I missed you. (Aside: Though I would not admit of it to startle and flush any loyal heart, I did, and wonder at it. What kind of woman I, to be emblazoned, rubied, by two lovers?)

AMRIAM

What kind of a lack was there in you for me? You who like Delilah undoes me as no warrior could. (Unmanned by a woman, how the gods make fools of all our prowess to soften us.)

MIRELDA

A surprising lack; a verse without its troubadours.

AMRIAM

And Baldorf, he who sings, does he still play a song to you?
We know: the village knows its cotters and villeins. I am a king; I know the knights and princes of my country, lass.

MIRELDA

He merely sung my heart to sleep at your request, when he doth pass this way with song.

AMRIAM

And now?

MIRELDA

Could it be meet to love two hawks?

AMRIAM

One a gyrfalcon and a kestrel one?
I love my hounds the twain and more; the one who points, the one who stalks.
Nay. The emperor's gyr will plunge upon the lesser bird for meat. If you would prove the courtier content; oh hawk who flirts with tiercels two, fain mate the one to prove thee true. Come nigh and from a suitor's talons take a bite by beak, and let my feathers mantle thee.

(He goes to her and envelops her, kisses her; she yields.)

Black out.

Scene 5

MIRELDA and GWNFRITH put Yule greens up. Must indicate time has passed since October 31st. It is now December 24th.

GWINFRTH

Then has thy engagement set its course from Hallowes to the Yule banns? The time has hunted us and paws us down.

MIRELDA

How many weeks, the magical seven and some days? Too fast to set my ways unto a king, and change my boat of skin upon the river fork…

GWINFRTH

What say? Hast not put down to the sea and grown to know it, beached? Are still a windy lass?

MIRELDA

Yet from a distant castle. My sail would home, my falcon too.

GWINFRITH

And give up a king?
What secret doth your wings shade? Come now and cough it up, your packet of bones; I see your wings askew.

MIRELDA

I would forthright then, confess that I love two. One attracts for the power of his presence; he is the dark stretch of shadow between the windy trees, the wild lands beyond the walls—thus he impassions me; the other for his power gains me, not for ambition, but for the force itself that by love's power might be changed. Here is a world I'd love, but not a man alone.

GWNFRITH

Then is it power you have and would wield, for men for a fair bosom may be made fools.

MIRELDA

No, not power for myself nor for itself, 'though my poor dame lacked a power in love which I may claim, to my surprise--for my darkness I thought less pleasing than the fair. Through my power, such as by grace of nature I have, I might change a man and so his world.

GWNFRITH

Thy open nature serves you well; courtly love is what they paint, but t'is not true; his pride will crack and from its color leap new flames.
My Lady, may I be so bold, I would unleash your kestrel in favor of the emperor's bird.

MIRELDA

Wherefore?

GWNFRITH

Power is its own liberant. You have seen how the large hawks fly in spirals to the sun, illuminating all their colors as the light pierces, and how the littler ones must stress their breasts a-hovering in hope for food, and often, like the little owls sad in winter storms, lie down and die in famine. I am a little bird, and often prey myself. I am thankful for our provisions, yet were I to rise, be given by the gods a bigger set of wings, would I refuse them? Nay. I would take the pair and keep them to my heart and by their power would escape.

MIRELDA

Escape to where?

GWNFRITH

You can fly where'e'r you please when hoods are on the hawk. Why not a Queen be and have a lover too? You love them both, then take the fiercer one and pet the gentler tiercel when the wind is loud and covers the doe's tracks.

MIRELDA

Mayhaps.
Ah these evergreens perfume cleanses as the wheel turning toward the Day of Yule begins. So why then; what is this? I am nauseated once again.

GWNFRITH

Have you been down to bed with either man?

MIRELDA

You have known me since my youth. Are we not sisters in our comparison years, if not equal companions in the eyes of kings?
Were I to allow it that some madness made me bequeath my youth's breast to both the singer and the king—if so, what would you advise, were you I?

GWNFRITH

Were I to be in love, a sweet mown thought, my heart would lead my legs akimbo; the nectar lusts of night would, under a clear moon drunk down by river mouths, persuade me.

MIRELDA

You love your husband not?

GWNFRITH

I make do with him. You know him, how trodden true that Henry is, with a pledge of love of such a heavy dough there is no yeast in it to make it rise.
I did not choose him. And the more I lay with him, the more I chose Christ to be my savior, and beat the wantonness out of me.

MIRELDA

I am as thee--though station part our company--but woman. And the pulse of heart within my mortal wind informs me I am living for an hour or two.

GWNFRITH

Which then might be the father if this is thy concern?

MIRELDA

Which then might be the father? Oh stay my womb from this unhappy fruit. Too soon, and mischief like the devil's own to be with child now! How terrible that that which should delight as birth, causeth me the fear as if it were a plague.
I lay with Baldorf at All Hallowes and to him lost my maidenhead. He flooded me with a mad wind of love, a gale blew
my heart apart. Yet it could be the king's, for unhappy me, the king persuaded me (having entreated with my father for my hand, law does bind us); my spring was welled up with the pressure of the ground. I let him taste my waters, to persuade myself I loved the other not.

GWNFRITH

And did it thus?

MIRELDA

Would I could trust nature to do what it should do, but the mind and heart in animals as us do not follow it, nor God.
I am not a sinner for my roots are still with Druids and with rites of spring and fall, but yet, what have I done to Baldorf if I carry the seed of kings?

GWNFRITH

Shall I tell this to him?

MIRELDA

By all that is alive, no! Leave this to me and keep my secret from all ears.

GWNFRITH

I know a brew of herbs which might undo your plight…

MIRELDA

Then serve me with its sentence very soon and I shall be a virgin. Perhaps I am mistaken by fear in this swoon, for I am only by a fortnight moonless without blood. But herb or no, fruited womb or none--here is my plan:
Bring him these cakes I baked last eve, so he may see my craft. Here, go to the croft he lives on and take this message: "come to the festivities two days hence at Yule, and with the bringing of the big log from the forest-holds to the hall hearth hearty, be dressed a jester or in some other masque prepare, and by your instruments melliferous song make to bedrone the master, and I will mead prepare, and when he is bee-d by sleep and stung, before we are betrothed by proclamation,

take off with me by horse, and have your wealth arrayed elsewhere, with one of your rebellion's outlaws placed, protected."

GWNFRITH

And you will fly?

MIRELDA

I shall meet with him whether we flee or no, and let my longings loose; at least if I must marry let me know his breadth one last time next to me to dream on all the days.
I must decide my heart and choose my life and quickly before the banns are read.
My life moves too fleet, as is my fate, and as it hastens I would taste it, for tomorrow it might fall; autumn to winter changes quick and these quicknesses make me headlong to stop its tide and flood with love.
Yet, should I myself go to him to tell him/ I am with child?

GWNFRITH

Amriam has you watched. He would find you out, and then beware his pride.

MIRELDA

Then is the entertainment set for this night's feast planned?

GWNFRITH

I will go down to the kitchen staff and see it so.

MIRELDA

Stay, I will preserve the arrangements, and pluck me a trifle to cheer me! And from the kitchen bring an earthen bowl and flour too, for I would knead, and (in the comfort of the bread)—and in the yeast of peace may right's revelation rise.

Scene 6

The feast has finished. AMRIAM and MIRELDA are still at table. We see BALDORF beyond playing the carillons and Christmas revelers bring lanterns and songs and come for treats. Outside the castle walls there are rushes and ornaments beckoning the traveler in. Similarly adorned is the hall when the lights go up on it.

BALDORF

The trees afire with ice whose frozen frissons spark like my delight a white world white as unicorns which wait for life to start.
Vast airy freedom to be breathed in the magic lands afar.
Here, what celebration in candles, gold and crafts arrayed; adornments from the Holy Land and artisans alike. No wonder the king seeks riches: these ornaments are pleasant in temptation. What wonder in the arts of man which oft do mimic and surpass the hand of nature.
I too alight snowy engemmed; in fete my soul, engaged by the puissance of my youth; this Yule Mirelda will be my gift and we will flee to safety where our love may drift about us like the lazy snow. In this cold scene our life begins its opening season's warmth!

(Puts on his hood and enters.)

MIRELDA

(to herself looking out, perhaps hearing the sound of four cup bells being struck, while a carillon, and hand held bells peal.)

See how he shines as merry as the bells he plays, as clear in form as is their sound; his hair silvered with the moon; how
Noel is adorned, enhanced by him, and see the carolers beyond respond: a verse he plays, a verse he sings and then they dance.

(to AMRIAM)

I would join the dance and song.
See one of the musicians is entering the hall.

(It is BALDORF, masked.)

BALDORF

(disguised, aside)

May my tones be disguised.
Good Yule. May fairness lay upon the land in the New Year.

AMRIAM

Good Yule and welcome with your carolers beyond though they who feted before, after the fox and trumpeting shawm and the gifts and dance--have to their chambers gone and will return at midnight for the proclamation of the kingly banns to wed this princess.
I asked for Baldorf but my page said his hovel was hinged up and a message left that he upon some poacher's business went; sent he you in his place?

(The masked musician plays a different instrument from what BALDORF usually uses. He disguises his voice and acts as a jongleur doing juggling. GWNFRITH and MIRELDA ply AMRIAM with wine as the scene unwinds, but he does not drink. As the scene continues BALDORF notices the sobriety of AMRIAM, nervously.)

AMRIAM

(Aside) Like the hawk plucking the feathers of its victim before it eats, I will dally with this musician, for I know who he is, but in revealing it rashly will uncover my spy whom I wouldst not throw away; there is more meat on that bone.
Ho then, he with the jester's hood who plays so well, will you not sing us a song? (aside: He is a mute. Lest I recognize his voice.)
This was a fair evening was it not?
See the festive hearth log and the wreathes hung about, and the servants departed all with a bag of booty, and all the
reveling serfs and villeins too, who with mulled cider take their ease.

(BALDORF SINGS in a countertenor)

AMRIAM

Even as my dogs have lain at my feet, and now to the kitchen go for treats, so you might be entreated with a bribe to tell your name?
Why not reveal yourself to me and kneel at my feet for honors?
Art a leper to wear long the hood? Or friar escaping from the monastery? Sole raptor, art a prince without inheritance who would do a joust with kings for fame or live on seconds?
Have you no wife to knit for you?

BALDORF (sings this)

I may have one. But she is not a knitter. She might weave flax in spring and wash it with the lambs.

AMRIAM

(fills BALDORF's goblet but stares into his own.)
She embroiders then, as spiders do?
All women are faithless.

BALDORF (singing)

If I may make so bold, my voice grows richer with a throat of spiced wine. Match yours my Liege with me. A toast to the mistletoe.

AMRIAM

No toast.
I will unmask thee, and be warned. Those who would ride from distance to take my castle's keeps will have a sorry payment. You who would switch a rook with a king and castle--may be checked!

(He unmasks him)

MIRELDA

Baldorf!

AMRIAM

You knew, you knew his masque, feign no surprise. I know your intention.

MIRELDA

(aside) My servant hath betrayed us.

AMRIAM

Your servant is a cooing squab (too coy to sound)
I needed not her beak to feed this nestling meat! Nay, she is loyal to thee.
I have men who listen. Who do my bidding at my command.
Then you confess you would elope!?

BALDORF

I would you choose your arms and by the honored laws of battle do with me a fair play.

(Under his cloak is a sword which he has his hand on)

Let us no more be pigeons but instead like horned harts or men have at it honestly for this lady's sake and more. She loves you less than those beyond your walls do love their master. Let her go, or fight me for her, not as mortal foes, but fair men who would husband flowers of the field in their protection.

AMRIAM

Put your sword down or I shall call my guards. Poacher. (I am sickened that I find a doe already meat for foxes, yea it is mine, nonetheless, and I shall take it, carrion.)
I loved a doe but find she has been sullied by a fox who rolls in carcasses.
It is not her reputation, nor her virgin head, but her loyal love which grieves me in its loss.

BALDORF

Then you will reason with me and with her. Let her speak her choice, as Aquitaine has made of women valor in their souls equal to their men.

AMRIAM

It is I who order men, not thee, nor Aquitaine, nor courtly love, nor she! Then tell me, why the hood and mask to falsify thy self?

BALDORF

The disguise, to come and carry her hence before we were discovered.

AMRIAM

With her consent?

BALDORF (says nothing.)

AMRIAM

(ascends to the balcony and play rest of scene looking down at them)

You would set rebellion to a king by the usurpations of his rightful lusts!

BALDORF

Let me speak plain

AMRIAM

..why have your say? What hubris to speak. Falcons have no words, they merely stoop; and you are still a blue cere lest you would have held your notes and simply flown with talons full of her.

Because you are a fool and young, I will not reason with you. I will send you as the fool you are, off, like David with Uriah

o'er Bathsheba's troth, to the Templars' towns, and bring your lute but stash your other riches, lest I take it all. That land you love to harvest will pain you in its absence and these seasons' celebrations too. That much I spare you, and your stock of land. It will remain here for your exile's time; that be five years. And when you do return, may take them back.

BALDORF

Let me away with her! Thou mayst find another, richer, and more harmoniously allied…

AMRIAM

…If you do reappear within this castle's towns, beyond the moat a mile where the unicorns stray, before the time is up, you will be dead.

I will be a falcon from above to see you as a mortal mouse afar and strike.

Choose, lady. If you want him now, then / go with him to Egypt and beyond, and I'll be done with you.

But if you go with him and then return, five years or any hour, you will be taken to the towers and beheaded.

I am a king you trifle with and not a serf! My name is Amriam and not Baldorf!

Mind, as you leave here, do not think to take a caracle o'er waters to the other lands, for my guards will be with you till you are safely stashed upon the vessel carrying men to Africa.

BALDORF(to MIRELDA)

Come with me; we will make our way to foreign lands where I will make amends with Saracens and they will take us in. I have heard tell of knights who have done such and make a merry life in their civilization, and who have fortunes they would never garner here.

AMRIAM

My troops will know you for a traitor and will strike you with their talons to the ground. Do you not envy me my power? Would you wish t'were I within your thrall? Be open now.

BALDORF

I wish your power, but I would …

AMRIAM

…Use it justly, yes, hast heard it Baldorf. Go.
Lest I impale you in my jealousy, like a woman taken by force on an engorged choler. I will win this woman in your absence and make her my falcon on my arm, and hunt her as I will; and every day you'll think on it. A Warden poaching the king's stags might face his just death. I have been
ruthful, as it is sooth, that Christ's Mass and solstice require their enchanted truce.

MIRELDA

First, my king, give me your word that you will not harm him on his way and that I may have a letter not intercepted to know that he be safe.

AMRIAM

How dare thou who wert deceitful and conspired behind me ask a boon? Yet, I am mighty and the mighty may look down on those who'd wrong them with disdain and mercy them. You are a child to the father's rood. Have your note and road of safety guaranteed to this you do prefer to me.

MIRELDA

Then give me your word that what I may say will not attract your lightning, and safe from your Jove-like wrath, I will pledge my troth; but let me have my say before our bondage for eternity.

AMRIAM

I am magnanimous, having won this day. I will keep you to extract my pay; to cast you back to fathers would arouse the baron marchers' ire, though it be just cause. It is politic to do this wedding business with thee. Bring on the marrying friars!

MIRELDA

Then listen and heed well; I am with son within or daughter, yeah with seed; and like the flower or the weed,
it grows to something we may not control by herbs nor potions.
Then let you guess whose child it will be and in which love conceived. For though the law may bind me to you, you cannot
trump the heart to do your bidding, and hearts will rise untrodden ‘gainst their bindings.

AMRIAM

Then I should hang and quarter you for such offense.

MIRELDA

To do so will leave you childless, a question as to whether the inheritance was thine.

BALDORF (in her ear)

My love, it was just past you came to me; how can you know so soon?
Or did you lie before me with him who will betray us both and this the source of certainty?

MIRELDA (in his ear)

Leave me my secrets for the safety of us both.

AMRIAM

I could have you put away for lechery, for by Augustine’s church canon it is my right to marry a virgin.

MIRELDA

Yet my law is that of Wales, which granteth more to women than your Norman lecheries. And as I am as much a Blois as
Saxon, my father, still by the rites of Druids sets his sword. As Boadica and Mathilda held their own, so will I.

AMRIAM

Laws of Wales: a gentleman needs his “harp in tune, cloak and chessboard-- a cushion for his chair AND a virtuous wife.” I will cast thee out, or marry thee to this, slay him for a traitor, then sell thee as widow to the first man I may.

MIRELDA

Though my father is poor, as you have said, he is respected amongst the outliers for his council and courage; offending him would bring dissension in the kingdom.

AMRIAM

He would condemn you as a common harlot for such wantonness himself.

MIRELDA

My father has not once made judgment of his daughter, and I know his mind where you do not. Tis to protect me. Thus he married me to you. (To do my duty in the graces of the world and they, condign.)

BALDORF

Declare your love, or let me go to the Crusades and fight not against the infidel nor Christian lords, but for my self, for death to end my molted years, for like the peregrine who stoops as quick as blizzards douse the light in small things, I am sudden-deadened by your betrayal. I have myself, a man, not to be made whole by woman, yet as I was born of woman so my life is cut in half without my love. I did depend on it in my beguiled wish, and faulty plan for it all things, the book of days together, you to weave and knit, and I supply you with the game, and rationed tallow for the candle--the pleasures of the hearth and kin by competent hands the both of us. Yet you fear to bend with me, and would a lady limitless in leisure be and rich in light.

MIRELDA

No, I fear not your nature nor its ways, and welcome it and the wandering too. I cannot let you go unloved. You are the scent of leather and of hay, the night's delight and all the comfort feathering down of days; my wheat-corn and my seed. Do not go dejected to this fate, though you lose me, the child will be taken care of and you will live by this my gamble …

AMRIAM

(still from the balcony)

Do you then dare to tell me that this child is his? And if the bastard in my home will be an asp, then should I not rid myself of it? And of the breast which nurses it?
Why tell me this now after you had me married by my words and as women do, might have gone merrily in deceit to be a queen?

MIRELDA

To make you keep faith with your word of safety for Baldorf. For if you slay him, I will take my life, and thus the seed within me.

AMRIAM

I vow when this thing comes, will like the fabled lions off in Africa, have him slain, or soon as eat this young! And when your womb is empty will impregnate you, so the king's bed will know a royal cub. How should I bequeath my fury on you both? Come here wench and I will strangle you and kill this man.

(HE takes a long bow and arrow from the balcony near the fenestre.)

MIRELDA

Stay your hand. I did not say the child was his, only that I love him.

BALDORF (is puzzled.)

MIRELDA

I am darkened, thus. The light of play, otters at the copse, foxes on the grasses dismayed to end my innocence thus. I would give love as flowers would give petals to the light to breathe, but then to whom, and whom to grieve for? And this child, would love it too. Does it matter who its father be, but that it comes to earth a happy gurgling thing, and coddled in the grass and full with meat? Who can do this for it, please?

BALDORF (gently)

I can.
It matters not; if you will abandon him and be with me then beget this darkness out of here and start out quickly for
the light. Be not an owl now, disperse your woe and we will wander into exile and will soon go. (Leave we -- hawks for the sun and those who will be owls to the moon.)

AMRIAM

My curse and death upon you for my pride. For if this is my seed and you have lied, or hide the truth, I will have the babe, and keep you prison'd bride until its birth, and slay your lover with swift talon.

MIRELDA

Be done with this. My heart cleaves to the moon and would fly to her. Let the two of you make peace o'er me that am the vessel for your rage. For the child's sake, let there be truce and speak no more in choler. Go Baldorf, and return and when you do I will be here and wed. And Amriam, my liege, let me do obeisance to what is in my skin, perhaps its father, certainly its king.

AMRIAM

May it be born a monster if it is not mine.
(to Baldorf)Gather your things and go. Think not to escape; it would be to thy death.
Mirelda, come with me.
Gwnfrith, company this cullion until the (cortege)(corson) of guards collect him.

BALDORF

As I go to the woodland mystery for meat, and the night sky for the question of stars, I go to thee for warmth and everything I might protect, which would make my future kind --if there is no famine nor plague nor roofless days, as some may needs endure-- yet even they would be made less trials with thy presence. /I will be a cast out in the briars, a fox with a tail on his nose in snow, denless; no lair without you, my lady, Mirelda.
Here my happy life is shrouded now in wolven hungry woe.

MIRELDA

Bend like the withe whilst I, each circle of these castle's stones will jail my heart, and at the bars my heart will stop like this.

(She goes to her caged falcon and wrings its neck.)

AMRIAM

(coming down from the balcony)

You are shrewd, casting yourself in another mold than most of your sex--and for the moment that my admiration of your bold truth conquers my ire--you have checked this king for now, a worthy partner as a foe; knowing this alliance is more than lust's issue, and conceding that a woman may have the same flesh as man, the rib of which she is—-desire similarly—-I want no pale candle who fears the shadow of her own flesh, no none-nay--we will go forward with our wedding vows! And my heart will not pale at a rival boy you think your heart dies for. As you have undone your hand, this sport of love excites: You will learn to love me, this know I!

(AMRIAM is down, and MIRELDA throws the dead bird down as they exit their separate ways.)

BALDORF (aside)

How could I be so folly filled, to have planned in such haste and so poorly? Now is my love's troth not to be, never; nor consummation ever of the flesh in soul enfired, but iron time itself imprisons me afar for five years, not to see her nor my babe {my eyas and my eanling lost}—and more: I have just in my impassioned arrogance of love abandoned the fair cause of Marcher kings to their own glory; for myself cast down in mortal
shame will be. How may a life's new aspirations be ungreened and tindered in a minute! How may in a few weeks all the seasons of my life be set?

GWNFRITH

Why would you throw your self away on love? It is unman like.

BALDORF

I am a musician more than knight, unman-like means naught in my notes; my delights differ from these poor demands.
You, you betrayed us to this man.

GWNFRITH (sniveling)

You wrong me with your unjust accusation. It is she who is your plight's cause. For she is Flora, who by her poppied ferment will distract her minions from their sense who thinking otherwise are bent like fronds unto her bloomy scent.
Why wouldst love her now when better women are abundant nightly more well tempered?

BALDORF (aside)
(She did daff me, and yet as I love, I trust my heart's truth; there must be as she vowed, some goodness in't.)

GWNFRITH
She is wicked, and uses her beauty to entrance. She used you for a dalliance and would choose power over your notes' romances. Thus why should you mourn her? Be done with her; she is a lazy woman and a fey, not worthy of your thought.

BALDORF
She made in me delight; I was content in her. Like faith, 'tis not explicable, not rational; just good, pulled like the ocean to the moon. But now without her, I am not content; something is cut from me, a living heart pulled from my chest.

GWNFRITH
She gladdens thee, why then with your life dissolving and your heart near tears? She who hath betrayed thee with another man.

BALDORF
You are an envious slut.

GWNFRITH
Cert, I am no slut.

BALDORF
Then I wist your envies are bawds to miscreant ambitions. For them you would traitor your lady. (If all women would disavow their hearts for convenience then perhaps it is you who taught her thus!)
A scaldy sowter would owe more faith in his barking than thee.

GWNFRITH
I have a higher faith at heart then a mere mistress.
List, I can hide you.

BALDORF
Wherefore?

GWNFRITH
To have you in my favor.

BALDORF
To purpose what?

GWNFRITH
I know not yet.

BALDORF

You would by me ply your way to some rise. I would not be the dough to your hands nor row your galleon.

GWNFRITH

Why sire, I have your good salvation true at heart. (And this be no betrayal if the soul is valued more than mortal duty.)

BALDORF

If you can hide me, then take me with you and be done with it.
Oh, here come the guards to guide me to the boat. If you can think to hold them off, then do it.

GWNFRITH

What will rewards then be to jeopardize myself?

BALDORF

A good heart to sleep at night.

GWNFRITH

And your good offices?
For I am no Judas, nor ambition's drab but let me reveal myself as a Cathari, minion to a prouder / justice.

BALDORF

You are a woman, the Albigensians scorn women as impure; even Mary herself is too tainted for the birth of Christ through her bleeding womb, and so Christ came through her ear.
Raymond of Toulouse, the scion of troubadours and Waldo the merchant of Lyons who gave his money off to beg as a mendicant for the world's sins, are Albigensians: Cathari arrayed in bitterness against the corruption of the church. They play music, so I am their kin in tone in truth. Though their means of chelating the contaminant are foolishness.

GWNFRITH

I am an acolyte for my true brother who is the Friar Hyppolyte.

BALDORF

I have heard of him. But your brother is a cobbler…

GWNFRITH

We were born both, Hippolyte and I, from the putrefaction of a friar who kept a concubine off the bounty of his country church.
My dam, the one you know, adopted me. Hippolyte went elsewhere. Like thee, I am not blood to my dam's son.
I can never attain Perfection; no woman can. But we can keep men from sin by abstinence who have been made wretched by the conceits of courtly love.

BALDORF

You are abstinent but have a husband?

GWNFRITH

And we have no children, notice, sire.

BALDORF

Your god made you barren?

GWNFRITH

This is choice; I use herbs, pennyroyal, tansy…

BALDORF

Then cert you use your husband ill, deceiving generation's will.

GWNFRITH

My husband is a seeker for the sustenance of Christ, and I "credente" am acolyte for him, a spirit wife.
This woman who takes your lust and storms you, abandoning you beyond the castle to her own ambition, she is the devil the Cathari fear; nay, not she herself, but those alike, who in their blind beauty, like Flora the spring goddess, strew from their aprons flowers of poison at each step, confusion and besottedness. (For unblessed beauty is a blasted curse for which sake Danubians still flay its skin.)

BALDORF

This is stinking envy…

GWNFRITH

No, this is God.

Be pure as the men of God who lead this sect and be protected by them. We will hide you from the king—--and Flora, too.

BALDORF

I am a singer for her Lady, and a planter not a praying man, and I no loyalty may offer to your cause, be warned;
And as you fit with venomous words, this my Mirelda-- I would spurn it more.
I would not let thee hide me for there I would constant blackmailed be, twisted to your plots; I wist your tales are less true than you would set them up.
Cert it is too late; the guards come through the gate to take me.

GWNFRITH

Then be gone to Africa; but take this, if thou needst a convoy out from thence.

BALDORF (he looks at it)

If I use this your brother's friarly pass (if brother he be) I shall not be beholden to your will.
Then you would help me though I am faithless with your Cathar cause, and curse you for your treachery?

GWNFRITH

There is only good and evil at God's decree.

BALDORF

Which one do we be?

(Guards knock at the door. She exits to let them in. BALDORF is left alone. Lights down. Gloomy. Wind.)

BALDORF

Then like a sudden night of solstice which in a spark eclipses day, all prospects which I sought like light to storm of night doth slip away.
As if by shock of plague in accident of fate cut down, the white trees freeze, and burdened now like bowing horses by the weight of snow, the poor rook caws in hunger as the sparked glory breaks and falls. Woe.
A great burden such beauty is to break the branch.
Escapists for a victory of freedom, we were, oh brief glory of day; now each milked line of purity curdles on the tree, and branch enmeshed with a fantastic hush and wing of pale feathering now by the winds' rage is blackening.

(One guard perhaps in chainmail and helmet enters to take him off in a gentlemanly fashion.)

To the Holy Land I go!

End of Act One

Optional INTERLUDE

MIRELDA

A raven to my lair,
I did retire to the very center of the castle like the king upon the tafels board, and would wander the dim mint scented woods no more. Like a maid Owain in madness I for my wood-sense mourned.
I married and then hid in my bed chamber. Curtains closed me to the world, one candle beyond. The castle fearsome cold. The blizzards ate the bones of the land and buzzards and wolves hounded the carrion of my soul. As you were embroiled in war my heart would in a blue flame think of you, and guilt that I had put you there burned me. I dreamt you under the covers nose to nose.

(GWNFRITH knocks)

MIRELDA

Let thee not intrude!

AMRIAM (enters)

Are you in need of any comfort for the coming child?

(spot light fades on him)

MIRELDA

After the child, he, the king, continued good to me, forgave me for my love of you--though Gwnfrith came to sit with me. I took your letters and sent her out from me.
After the bonny child was born a prince, I attended to it and recovered some for love of him.
I walked the halls again.
I took your letters; they came delayed by months. My fears lessened for myself, but for you I ever feared your death or wounding, and your loneliness.
Yet your trials you grew used to it appeared; your letters fewer, and I in time my lot accustomed to became. Yet did rely upon your missives / as my soul healed--even as some may go to gods for soothing--as articles of faith may strengthen hearts to face a daily life.
And I forgot your face's fire in my blood.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Winter solstice in the castle, 4 years later.
MIRELDA with GWNFRITH. Choosing fabric: deep blue, purples, crimsons, black and silver velvets and silks which all please her with their world of colors and textures. They also choose dainties, spices and treats from MERCHANT in his peaked cap and jerkin. New baby, the second born, is nearby in a cradle.

MIRELDA

It is solstice eve, nigh unto our fourth anniversary of my betrothal, and for this day the king has let me pick a world of pleasures. Which one, the deep blue of a tarrying of stars or this?: the amethyst and crimson do delight each other in velvets, as doth this silk; nay I choose this raiment, this one here in black with silver broidered.
Gwnfrith, pick thee a spice or trifle; here, take many back to thy husband and thy mam; for the memory of her Michaelmas cakes, my first.

GWNFRITH

None, thank you. I have no need for charity.

MIRELDA

I do not condescend to thee, but care for you; and as you have chosen not live here in the hall for every day--your journeys back and forth may take their toll.

GWNFRITH

I am near enough.
Wellborn women can afford beneficence for they are cared for and their worries few; not sheared like we sheep close to the skin and nicked by every plight. You have your needs supplied.

MIRELDA

Your tone is hard.

GWNFRITH

Angered as mortals are who serve not the purpose of their time.

MIRELDA

Who would you be? What purpose serve and what attain or what acquire?
Have not enough at home or here? I offer you your needs.

GWNFRITH

They say your husband needs a leash, lest he harvest all that is not his. My husband even doth complain of losses to your liege whose rents worsen they of late -- to buy

thee fabrics! By your beneficence we eat, but were I not in train to thee, we would have hollows in our cheeks, bare larders, barrels rotting and a fire low, his knights collect so much. Many rattle in their coops, bellies fill with anger for our hunger gains the king his glory, chalices and robes.
Tell the king this thing, but say not my mouth has formed these words.

MIRELDA
Then I will speak of it. But blame not my profligacy; I do not ask for silks.

GWNFRITH (after a pause)
Do you not miss the Apollo with his lyre? A different ilk than kings?

MIRELDA
I am a wife with young. I pray for his life, but have come to love my liege who has protected me. I owe him my fealty for his forgiveness and am thankful that your herbs those years hence did fail.

GWNFRITH
Yet do you not wonder what the long nights would be with him who is at war?
Here your living is safe; with him adventure might have been.

MIRELDA
You ask me this question oft'; why must you worry it? Are you my confidante or ferret? Or some blacksmith who must try my metal till it breaks?
The wind blows hard on the wild wolds, and without a castle may kill the soul. It is a man's life to live like a lion.

Yet, have you no word of Baldorf still? It is his letters more than his very presence I must confess I miss. Why are
there no more missives?

GWNFRITH
By what means would he send them from the foreign lands--by Templar's pouch? For were he to, they would be read and confiscated by the new zeal of the Hospitalliers lest he encode a secret to the enemy unwittingly which gives the war away.
I hear tell that he is brave and makes a reputation for himself.

MIRELDA
How hear you tell? At the inns which travelers adorn and sailors lie within?

GWNFRITH
I have my ears.

MIRELDA
T'is privilege to travel to public places I may not, save in an entourage.
News travels three months late, by now he could be dead. My heart would feel it were it so.

I put my trust in thee, but I remember how he was unmasked after you were my confidant.

GWNFRITH

My queen, you do me wrong with such suspicions.
You are heartless to think so low of me. The king himself said that the betrayal was by a man of his who listens at the arrases; nay, so many listen, spy and gossip, and if they gain a benefit from it they will. T'was not I.

MIRELDA

My lord Baldorf warned in his waxed missives that you are not my friend. Lo, they reached me from the east for months, then stopped.
Save for each Yule, then one a piece.
The fourth is due. He relied on you once because we had none other for a go-between.
If you stay his writs, I implore you as a woman, stop up your envy; our positions each have merit. You are less jessed than I.
You fill your days with useful labors, while I may have the privilege but am in part a prisoner.

GWNFRITH

I would be such a slave.
Your lord gives you leave to hunt your falcon at your leisure wandering the hills and forests at your will. You are no prisoner. (And may hear the hard sea alone.)

MIRELDA

Your voice is hard soil beset with the salt weed of jealousy.

GWNFRITH

Jealous! I wouldst not be thee! I have my worlds.
Be grateful for the love of two men, and two such, for that alone I do confess some envy, though I am Christly wed and shun love.

{MIRELDA

But your husband is fond and doting.

GWNFRITH

My husband is poor, though born better than I, as you well know.

MIRELDA

You play him.

GWNFRITH

As you play your prince.

MIRELDA

I play none. I loved them both and therein my dilemma. (Why not allowed to have two hearts?}
You are a hussy, and love none.
Yet the troubadour is in my heart a recollected dream which gives me distance from my liege, never quite caught. Amriam may be a brute to men, wouldst I could cure him of that fault, give him his conscience just-—but he is courteous to me and in his love he saves me from disgrace and loneliness.
My loyalty is his, even unwillingly.

GWNFRITH

You think too much of love and its frivolity for you have no cares of lack-- what mouths may go unfed. You need not
make your way, subject to the whims of those who give you menial tasks for bread, a pledge of meat and tallow for your keep.

MIRELDA

I have seen the years unmask your sourness to me. I shall let you go.

GWNFRITH

They say that all the world may hate a spoiled queen who does not love her God.

MIRELDA

Say what you will. The world will know a hornet.

GWNFRITH

I am in the king's service now. Only he may cut my bonds. And he will not.

MIRELDA

Then for the honor of the time we have entwined our lives, let us make peace; if we must live with each other, let go your hostages of envy and be tender with me.
I will attend the fires below; leave you to your own time today. And ask of me what you will.

(GWNFRITH exits. AMRIAM enters.)

MIRELDA

All day have we baked; and beyond that choosing these delights, my lord.

(The MERCHANT bows out as MIRELDA waves him on; leaving his goods.}

AMRIAM

Does it become a queen to bake as it doth a lady?

MIRELDA

This queen forsakes her birth. She enjoys to work her hands.

(hearing sounds)

So it would seem our nestling is a bird to speak.

(picking up a baby from his swaddling place:)

AMRIAM

What hath he chirped?

MIRELDA

Of gurglings and spit so far.

AMRIAM

Like a good bitch who takes her first bird, and senses herself no more nervous but competent, made for a purpose to which she be bred, so you, like all good animals or trees, take your place--less girl, less airy, but now rooted like a woman is. Come into the blood there in your line, are well suited to a mother and a queen. The soft ground in you lies open and prepared to spring a line of oaks. And I have brought you to your place, into your own season.

You now have grasped as I have groomed; the falconer tamed his bird.

MIRELDA

Thence mantle me, your prey.

AMRIAM

Men of puissance need a soft down of smooth and perfumed flesh for their comfort, and beautiful women beseek them

of indulgences. Here.

(He gives her something spectacular, perhaps a gold pendant with a falcon, or a heraldic shield of her own with unicorns and falcons, or a new falcon.)

AMRIAM

I would bring the mummers, jongleurs and musicians; but perhaps song this day would make in you unpleasant meanders of rememberings.

MIRELDA

I have no memory of another time. The dreams of my past were the dreams of a sprouted freshet.

Then have at last you forgiven me for what has gone down river long ago?

AMRIAM (IS QUIET)

MIRELDA

You have been good to me and the time is good. The child is my beloved bauble; our eldest a stout apple lad, and love is about.

AMRIAM

Then I have won you.

MIRELDA

If I give you my scarf and you joust with it, you will seek another; men of power only conquest covet. I was the cowering hawk and honey beyond the bees, and so you were intrigued.

AMRIAM

How are you so skilled in the ways of men?

MIRELDA

You know this for I have seen the courts for so long. Besides, my blood knows you, like a dog its rabbit.

AMRIAM

Then you will not confess in words what I know in the dawn-fields of your flesh upon me under the canopy when the curtains are drawn and the velvet fires are up?

MIRELDA

No. Lest I and my children lose our hold on your affections in your eternal quest for their good grail.

There is a sound of armor, horse and bell. Ask the guards who is the entourage I see afar.
Ah I see their flags; it is Sir Nuilly with his knights.

AMRIAM

You grow more fully ripe each day. (And in that repast fear I a betrayal. Thus I desire it and fear it both.)
Without you / I am a scar.

MIRELDA

Then I am happy to be the flesh you prick.
Come to me. Surround me with the enceinte of your arms, moat and keep me.
(They embrace affectionately.)
I tend well to your needs and do not ignore you when you entreat?
Here I am enforted.

GWNFRITH (enters)

Your prince-advisor of the march of coracles and bogs, Sir Nuilly, begs an ear of your king Amriam.

(As NUILLY enters, GWNFRITH exits)

NUILLY

(Kneels to MIRELDA, kisses her hand.)

Sire, there is blood in the lowland west. A man whose name is Montfort, or it is his nom de guerre, has raised the peasants against their lords and they have taken them hostage. They are demanding ransoms; they would buy the lords' lands from them with ransoms of us, and have taken the brother of Sir Niles. The towns are awry with illness. The waters tamper with health and the people complain that it is a plague of God; his seal of scarcity upon rebellion.

They yell for the law to be taken from the lords and churches and given to common men. They yell for their freedom from vassalage, no tithes—-they say they are oppressed, bled out by them--that all will own the land in common, and prosper jointly. They yell for the guilds to be let go to craft and trade with all in all nations.

AMRIAM

They do impair their voices with this shouting.

NUILLY

We come for you to lead.

AMRIAM

This Montfort must be of bloodlines disinherited; would rest his arm upon a word's rise and say it's for the people he persuades, but truly will he rob them worse than I.

NUILLY

Montfort fights like something conjured**.** He has them training on the knights' percherons and with archers who are yeoman who have outlawed and poached. They ride without armor and finding us too staunchly covered, drag us down from ambush, for they are limber and we are stiff.

AMRIAM

Strong mountain, strong mount, strong hold—Montfort**--** a likely name; a man may make a name, but a name which makes a man must proclaim a charlatan.

What think thee, my queen?

MIRELDA

Of rebels' plaints, I say they hath some grievances which need acquitting by my king.

AMRIAM

And you would thrust it to me; that is mine to do.

MIRELDA

Then ask me not, if you would flout my answers.
I see no harm in justice. My lady seneschal comes from poorer cousins who do ply the land. I see how calloused their hands become…though she plaints not. A quitrent would do them well—(might lease her to a different disposition.)
Indeed at home, my father's manse, I lived amongst the common swains, and they are competent and goodly in their seasons' arts, and are deserving of a whole hectare of a life; not clods left by the swelled vain charity of princely men (in their demesnes.)

AMRIAM

That charity is why you may, unstinted at Michaelmas and St. Stephan's, and Lady Day and Lammas quarters, disburse purses to our peasants.

MIRELDA

As I do. It gives me a reason to ride about. So I do not provide my life as cottars do, but I can ride to them, and ease their pains with food or coin or words, a few.

AMRIAM

Nay, they exalt you for it: this which envy maketh in me: your vast (capabilities), my restless queen. I give you due for you have lightened me. I am not perceived as quite so hard, here. Yet here it is. Hard I must be or they will take liberties**.**
They aspire who are clay clots and not angelic, to be free men. But I must side with princes of my realm who owe their kneelings to me -- and then to God.

MIRELDA

The princes do not need excessive tastes, so that they may exotic silks put on, and ride their horses and spend the rent on their debaucheries, in imitation of the country priests.

AMRIAM

The princes need to be the princes; they are better men; born better; this is their right.
Do not argue with me. You know nothing of the real ways of men, only of courtly sprites.

MIRELDA

I speak plain that I implore my king by the sustaining corn of the heart of the lands' heart and the flowers of May to see
the justice in his own frame and change his ways. He hath girth enough to loan some of his own flesh to others and be none the worse for it. Generosity would rebellion's contagion sop. You have spent too much on our frivolity.

AMRIAM

I like not to hear what I heard once voiced before by enemies. You are still influenced by that Uriah, and his chorus repeat!

MIRELDA

I am not influenced by ought / but have a daily thought of my own! I would, were I Amriam, disburse everything equally, a fair share to all in the labor's pot give back.

AMRIAM

Then who would be king? And why would they work and die, for themselves? Nay, they need a liege to give them reason.
Even the villeins need the walls and a hard hand, and were it not for my knights in the castle fed and wined, the marchers from afar would locust me**.**

NUILLY

The impoverished languish but will, if fed, take matters on.
Keep them on scraps I say, and they will be your servants and your pawns. Feed them and let them get beyond their daily errands and debts and they will feel themselves steeds and not the goats they are who butt against your legs.

AMRIAM

So it is with the peasants who are dogs: they are bred to plough. Awaken the soil in them and they know how and this is their destiny and blood, none else. They eat where they are fed.
As dogs must know their limits, peasants too, like children and like dogs will make demands for everything. The king must know when and what/ might be enough; peasants like dogs may sleep at feet/ but never take your bed.

MIRELDA

The serfs are men, not children, nor are they dogs; they do not train for treats.

AMRIAM

They do; they know their bounds and keep their heads down for a pet at saints' days all. Hounds.

(MIRELDA sits, in a state of temper held down.)

Who is still with us?

NUILLY

As yet those knights and earls are within your loyal fealty who benefit from this investiture in war, which spoils make them rich, as I have been enriched. I speak for many. In my experience is theirs.

AMRIAM

Who against?

NUILLY

Different degrees of nobility. Some complain that all the riches do your favorites honor.

AMRIAM

My favorites keep me king.

NUILLY

Some knights, both those landless and en-foeffed this round, return impoverished from the Holy City, as I, until you granted me a steward's place; and given all their fortunes to the holy wars are discontent and bootyless… and sometimes side with their villeins / and wonder why the likes of kings who stay at home are not impeached, and all their treasures given out.

AMRIAM

Let those be struck down at their fetes. Send Giles and Grillon with their arms and men. I see this be a ploy by lords to take the righteous power from the king!
Disarm and disinherit and then see the feckless faitors hanging!
So many younger brothers by primogeniture their castles lose / who live like of late he, Baldorf, did - on seconds.
Continue to enfoeff with money the first born and second sons as well with lands / taken from the disloyal.
I would go myself to re-place rebels in their ranks, save for the ruling duties which keep me here. I saw my fight in those Crusades. That is how I learned to value my own arm to kill, my skills as warrior and leader.

NUILLY

None better than.

AMRIAM

I know I am a man.
I was not a stay at home, but as a lad of fifteen fired up my father to outfit me well and he the king did put me forth, and all my brothers. Four there were as you well know, were also loosed upon the heathen lands. They perished there in Syria. Two of the water, one of disease, and one by a Muslim scimitar impaled. They died all saints. 'Hold how I enshrine them in my tapestries, scenes of their lives, the seven stations of their acts.
My sisters lost to illness and my mother, father, gone, I am no stranger to the shortness of this life we bear; and I alone am left to make a mark of it upon the world for what comes after and who came before, the honor of the Amriam line.
Immortal will I build more castles on this land which bears our name, if all the short lived swine who toil witless in the earth were coin for it!
It is my right!
But perhaps it **is** time for me to fight foe with my own hand once more.
These discontents have been with us for years.
This blight may not disappear / but flare to a full plague. Let us burn it out.

NUILLY

Then to war. Let you and I, and all allies, call in their men and covet victory. With skill, let us set spies amongst the enemy and hear them. Let us burn out their wives

at home and their fields so they may not eat. Let us cut the woods they poach in, and fill their moats with fire.

MIRELDA

Is it this the children will inherit? Will my boys ripen to men to rule for might, or war for sport?

AMRIAM

They will grow to own what is mine and the first born to rule as he should. If he is indeed my heir, I will teach him to put down all who oppose as I will put down these. He will not be kidnapped as these woeful pawns are taken.

MIRELDA

You will not yourself go to war, or find your bed bereft…

AMRIAM

Woman, you are a bed for a man, a mother for a child, a nurse to the less fortunate, but you will not tell me how to rule; you are not a man, nor a king.

MIRELDA

I am now your consort…

AMRIAM

And the world is not and never shall be yours.

MIRELDA

Then leave the world to you and it shall die in blood as it was born!
Each man has some heart to give the world, until you learn this, you will die unwise, acting mere for action's purport of itself, and arrogant deaf pride alone.
Good day my Knight, the king's advisor.
(She exits)

AMRIAM

(Taking Nuilly aside)

What of my rival, that Uriah for Bathsheba's breast, hast any word? I see the light brave go down bloody in the bruised sky. The ravens call. Is it an omen as the winter saves itself and as the earth lies down to sleep in lamby white adorned? Will that man die in battle there in heat, or cometh home?
Or should I have him slain?

NUILLY

He fights well, and with chivalry, and spares opponents it is said throughout the land. Those returning hail him as a hero, a Gawain. They know his sorrows for that you sent him into exile by your pride.

AMRIAM

By god, I envy him his prowess. Would I were there.
So they admire him? He gains a reputation men will follow?

NUILLY

I would leave him be. Odds on he will be swallowed by the Galilee of war. Make him not more known by an assassination--lest he be taken as a martyr by your hand. Let him be martyred to the Saracens, and this will cause more roar for war by his example.

AMRIAM

…He is no harm as long as he is gone.
His love of common men and of the land made him an enemy when he was home. More than the body of my queen gone to his arms, t'was this I feared: he was a power in my heavenly sphere about to shine, and influence was grave in opposition to my royal sway. No horse but mine shall ride these woods.
She merely gave me an excuse to do away with him.

NUILLY

What more? I see thy face rain.

AMRIAM

God's truth, I have a twained dilemma.
To wrest a royal showing befitting my household that I may sign the station of close kin of god I hold as truth to those who watch, assure my stature in bequests--and to reward the knights and lords who by the holy wars enrich my fame, I must rob Peter to pay Paul.
Clever trade by grain to gold and more fills my coffers, but in truth, the royal box is overdrawn and debt pursues me.

NUILLY

Borrow from the Templars who did steal from the Jews.

AMRIAM

To be in debt to stone ambitions who might by wood sense win my board?
Come ye to my chambers to discuss a plan. I shall follow in a nonce to chess my rivals. (Exit NUILLY up the balcony.)

End of Act Two

{{INTERLUDE

Plough Day. Feb.2. BALDORF as MONTFORT outside, to a crowd
some place. Three FOLLOWERS with him. Actors from past scene can cloak themselves in hooded garments quickly and be seen only from the back or sides in dim twilight with rushes aflame.
They cut the first furrow at land. Perhaps there is a backdrop from Duke De Berry's Book of Hours, one of the farming scenes.

MAN

Let me take my loaf of bread, knead it with milk and not with blessed water from the pope but with the stream's own nymphic self, lay it to the furrow.

"Acre full fed,
Bring forth fodder for men!
Blossoming brightly,
Blessed become;
And the God who wrought the ground,
Grant us the gifts of growing,
That the corn, all the corn,
may come unto our need."

BALDORF/MONTFORT

Wives of my men by this shared seed, what are your grievances?

WIFE

That they impress my man into the king's army against his will. {for we have no scutage to release us from tithes as do the knights from warrior service.}

WIFE TWO

That they tithe us until I have none left to trade for cloth for my children. My sheep die that I have no wool myself to full.

MAN

That the lords in drunken riches take our wives as they will and threaten us with death.

WIFE

That there are no laws to protect us from these violations.

WIFE TWO

That we cannot leave their lands and set up where we would, in the king's preserves perhaps. Nor will he assart us fields from his woods.

MAN

That we cannot hunt for deer or aught.
And if we protest they jail us and take our meager belongings! His banalities (taxes) for wine, milling and fish are higher sometime than his tallage (tithes).

BALDORF

Listen then, take hope and take its thyme and balm and comfrey in.
From the land to our hands to the lords to the king, oppression hikes its skirts.
Different degrees of noble and commoner alike are with us.
There are those who are princes who would preserve their rights for the people they protect, to let them live there for a rent and not a tithe; who will even give them land for a tax in
tribute, which is fair by laws, and let the land fallow for her own sake.
There are those who would set up a court of hearing of impartial equals to judge each case as it stands, and those princes will put themselves under this law for the fairness to all.

PEOPLE

Long live these princes and may we see them prosper for our sakes! Long live Montfort!

BALDORF

But there are princes who would usurp all the lands of the fair lords and those of the peasants too, and steal from them both, and make only might their law.

MAN

They have pressed us to the pike and they have taken and stolen and taken to enrich themselves so that we are sick
of them, and we have nothing left, no means of living, so
that we have only our lives left, which gladly to abuse them we would depart of.

WIFE

I will fight by my husband with a stock and a club if needs be.
I am tired of struggling against contempt. Let those who scorn us and who lie to us to keep us in thrall be destroyed. I will die for it! Only lead us on!

WIFE TWO

To prove I have a mind and heart as righteous as the mighty, deserving compassion and respect, wherefore Our Lord died, I will side with him!

MAN

"Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve? ..and what can they show, or what reasons give, why they should be more the masters than ourselves? except, perhaps, in making us labor and work, for them to spend." (Wat Tyler)

BALDORF

Then let us wander and sing to their castles and gain entry and once doing let us slay their masters, and then on with our army to the king!
We shall sing the song.

ALL

Ladies and lords, princes and cotthars
Would you rather have your soul for a day
Than the riches of hell
When the bells of the king's churches peal
Is it for wealth they steal your goods,
or God?
Will the princes rise on your granaries' prize?
Will you be impressed to fight in the east,
When the sun in the west is your home?
Will the church and the rulers make deaths
of your Life?
Let you husband and wife, take your pride in hand
And follow this band to the woods.
We live on meat. We will steal the gold
We will rise against castles and free their holds!
Onward, our brotherhood!

{Black out}

INTERLUDE

Some time later.

May, beyond the castle. The castle beyond is far less rich in appearance than in previous scenes.

Maypole festivities in front of processional backdrop.

(Slowly out front of castle BALDORF watches, hidden.)

BALDORF

(to himself)

I still loved her as a monk his god.
This was my one true faith in all the dark world-storm which kept me living to return alive.
How I was exiled double when I returned to find;
That she her love had changed to fit the king's mind.
Though I had courage to draw my sword for justice, my heart shivered like a bird beating its hunted wings to see her. I would not. But then I must, at least to view what I had lost.

Limp light of the forest in the glad rising of the day.
Tell me of love and am I gentle, when I am disgarbed of all but my sword? I know not.
Or am I a bee? Spring makes me a colt again, a tonic in the bones to spite love unrequited with its urgings…and the dark earth exudes her vixen pungencies to enchant me. Captured by the ribbons I remember time and mix my similes in wine.

AMRIAM

(to MIRELDA) Beltane it is-- and the betrothed may flirt in ease. The lords and ladies of fair birth

MIRELDA

Still supported by their artisans' labors

AMRIAM

(Intimately)

Princes may oppress, it is their right, as I may press myself to you.
We have chessed this 'til our wits meet at stalemate.
The mighty need the meek, they make a partnership, like colors on the playing board which complement; the scabbard to the sword or condiment to tend'rest cut. It is a need decreed.
But why do men need women? Why not forsake them for the glory and concatenation of war? Why not make room only for ambition? Or for a concubine for heirs?
Why be beleaguered by love?

MIRELDA

So you who change to me like the fop to his wardrobe; are't pleased with me today or beleaguered?

AMRIAM

You outplay me in spite of sense for your back is a panther's; your breasts are desire themselves; you are a ripe Africa I would plunder; the reason to acquire more.
What is it men want of women's sex besides the seed's inheritance; some semblance of nature's worlds in hand, in days before death; something to fill between the cradle and the grave, the hours well?
And women what of them?

MIRELDA

To have enough adventure, yet be safe, to have a hearth and not to wander, and yet to do… to help rule, to adorn the days with festivities, to know and use the homely crafts--at least myself: the kitchen pastries knead, choose arts to make the rooms a pleasant place--and bless the people in her walls with ease of suffering by her beneficence; to be and do of good… to have children… to strew petals in the spring… to be the root from which their mate's excellence flowers, if not to be the flower themselves…

AMRIAM

All women?

MIRELDA

Within most, quite similar I deem.

AMRIAM

Then you have much in common with your scullery.

MIRELDA

I wot. ((Aside) My scullery is free from mates, unlike a bonded Queen.) Not a bad thing that commoner's sense in me.

AMRIAM

Well then I married a donkey crossed with a Pegasus.

MIRELDA

I hope I am no ass

AMRIAM

Nay, but a seat to me.
Perhaps it be the lasciviousness of spring herself, the green lights pushing through the mouths of earth which alight in me and fire my body with sun. Warmed to thy flesh, as the hawks return and the trout run under the silky flames of streams, I am alive in thee! And be off-guard.

(A jongleur sings a song as AMRIAM and MIRELDA test the Maypole with a dance.) }}

ACT THREE

Scene 1

Five years have passed since the first act.
The Castle's walls seem to have a brownish cast, as if painted; even the tapestries seem dingy.
Enter GWNFRITH with MIRELDA.

GWNFRITH

Do you know what year it is this Christmastide? It is five.

MIRELDA

How for my two princely otters, shall we fuss and play? Gather all the young in the castle's village and have them come. Give them each gifts, dates and sweet-meats, find them chicks and poults to take…

GWNFRITH

There are none of these things.

MIRELDA

Scarce, but not none. Well, if none, we shall play games.

GWNFRITH (Being ingratiating.)

It is five years. He may return now.

MIRELDA

He who has not written for two years may now return, if he is alive? If he has not wedded some bright dark heathen thing. Why would he risk returning?

GWNFRITH

To claim inheritance of lands from his great guardian so recent died.
And for revenge perhaps. You abandoned him.

MIRELDA

Revenge upon Amriam. As for me he is a man, and these love dreams mean naught to them save for their pride.

(Aside)

Though it pains me. All women want their men to linger in their memory as the only field in which their harvest ripens well; none other take to husband; and my pulse shines like a dizzy planet still when he is in my thoughts.

(Trumpet and herald announces: "Baldorf, Knight of Templars!")

MIRELDA

(to GWNFRITH)

Are't a mystic to know the time of this precise?

GWNFRITH

I have my holy means which are denied to queens.

BALDORF (entering)

I am here.
Not Abelard but Baldorf, Uriah returned from war.

AMRIAM

(from balcony)

Welcome, he who from the past doth trumpet.
I saw your sentries there afar.
I bear you no ill will now. You have served your sentence, bravely, as word tells. I will come down to greet you. I have heard you courageous and courteous; your reputation makes men envious. The mystery is: the king of Templars knighted you although you are no Christian...

BALDORF

Milady…

MIRELDA

Baldorf! Lift me, my limbs betray me and sink to the floor. The years flood up to me! Why have there been no messages. Do you abandon me?

(Amriam enters down more quickly than Mirelda who has her back to him realizes)

AMRIAM

Lady, you are a queen! Come, come; what is this spectacle for a man forgotten while you proclaim your love for me! Oh untrustworthy principal, unstable humor**,** not choler, not sanguine, but something herbal, campion exploding to the touch of wind. Why put my faith in this; and why be strained by its weak fickle shift? (Worse than a hot shaft which rises and falls to every country flame.)
Then you have conspired with him and kept a contact through this exile's time. I warned you of your head for that!

BALDORF

Her head may stay a virgin, for she is naught to me, though she be Bathsheba's own-- and no attempt was made to speak to her, nor none to me for time.

MIRELDA

My Liege, forgive me. Time forgotten rushes at me, a ribbon to a serpent changed, and bites me. I forgot my head.
Oh, women are witless and for such may be forgiven.

AMRIAM

I would have slipt my life out of its locks for you.

MIRELDA

But now?

AMRIAM

Will keep my key for its own lock, seeing how you swoon at this knave's entry.
For I see by your final slip, at last where your heart lies.

MIRELDA

Nay, I have come to love you my King, for women need protection even from their own whims. Let us make light of it not heat.

AMRIAM

(aside) (I wanted her to wife, to bear the royal line, for none more beauteous and fine, of wit and spirit bred to a damascene -- and what found, but that her heart was given like a May lily to a dandy; that there behind my Sun's girth was shadow trailing me--usurper of an innocent love to soil it by their delight. I was not the first. No unicorn love to purify my soul.
Yet in spite of this I won myself to her. Fallowing her field by time's insistent seasons. Oh, but acolyte of Flora who gave her self in lust to this, and now reflowers in a winter wind these dure grasses, how might I push you from me? But we are wed and I will use you well, withholding love forever as I should before have done; your field shall become a dessert.)

MIRELDA

You are too thin for war, and famous victories.

BALDORF

I am stocky beneath my jerkins. My cudgels armed.

AMRIAM (greets him.)

But how many years did you stay in Egypt and parts? There is some tale missing from your legend. Some say you swelled a time in a caliph's court, and hunted lions.

BALDORF

I returned from whence I could have stayed as some knights do, living with wealth and women there and it was a spice which beckoned me, but I missed home. And made my way across the hard seas whose breath blew like atonement itself, for there was no light for weeks, until this land's scent I breathed.

AMRIAM

And when was this?

BALDORF

I be not sure of time exactly counted by the moon.
Then through the black forests after the blast of leaf-light fall had burned, expecting dragons, saw none; expecting faeries, they had gone; but knights there were who would do battle and many a scarf I took from them.

(He takes them from his kit and presents them to MIRELDA).

BALDORF

…then was often lost and hungry; but the outliers did feed me, wherein the monks would sooner set upon me and steal my gold by speeches of the need of God for it.

AMRIAM

Didst come upon a man named Montfort there perchance who poaches the Marcher nobles at his pleasure for a year, and picks our ranks apart, whose words derive some content from your youthful plaints?

BALDORF

The name is familiar as troubarites' lips ring of it.
But he has never crossed me. It's your God's truth, I wot.

AMRIAM

And what of war! By God I miss its weeks campaigns. It doth stir the manhood in the marrow, and by its deadly moments poised against one's heart, make life the more pointed at death's escape.

BALDORF

War. I grew to it, as I may organize my chords against the playing strings, so one assembles courage and dispassionate plays chess with men.
As I was wont to take the hart and boar with the dog and long or cross bow for my sport, on foot or on horse for
hours, without an entourage as you might have, save a few companions at my side some times, as my skills competent in
eye and hand and stealth for the blood sport in the cold winter woods when the owls cry and wolves eerie wail before red boars die by spears, no different war. I made approach and ambush for the Saracen harts. Though their dens were not stiff with frozen snow, but hot by rich lowlands between the caramel and camel sugared sands. I took them in their lairs as they denned down.
Blood ran upon my jerkin and I grew used to it; cries of men dying and their maids imploring grew a clamor in my ears, like gulls at the shore awaiting for my vessel to come home.
Then one has no heart for one's own kindred man.

MIRELDA

But your own men?

BALDORF

Were useful to save my life and theirs.

MIRELDA

And when they died?

BALDORF

My heart pinched me, but did not make me whole; I was left soulless even with a crying heart.

MIRELDA

Now at home, art more content?

BALDORF

… after the wandering, I wanted no less than to turn my soil, to find an onion in my late earth, to pluck herb Robert, Bear's foot, birthwort, feverfew - and let them heal my wounds, for I have some, and no maid there to tender them.

Like a dog I licked my own cuts and poulticed them. When the dream of canopies enchambering beds and the light from rest turned me toward the sun like lilies opening, there were none.

How I desired this, to lay me on some balm at the conclusion of these unwholesome deeds afar; how needless was this conquering of men who'd done no wrong to us, but I was punished by finding none at home, no heart I sought nor missed in memory of May nor perfumed garden.

{(Aside: Why did you not come with me? He made a knave of me--and all I wanted for my scarf and garlanding was thee.)}

AMRIAM

Yet women you just bespoke of, you caressed; dark heathen lasses long of tress?

BALDORF

In truth, did I grow homesick from them.

Look, new winter lays a first strike of snow upon the endless trees; long away are houses at the fields and town-- within the walls connected by the knights who ride to keep the boundaries.

But here the snow is peace and all the cold is all the rest and cleansing I might find.

But, let us men be gone with self-pitying love, with lowing self-pity.

(Jumps up on the long hall table in front of the great hearth, sits half prone, legs stretched out, facing front)

BALDORF

There is no thing worse than a stain upon your soul, no waking dream worse than losing your soul with the death of innocents. I found myself stationed in a castle from which we were forced to move into towns of mudstone and goats and olive trees; to put to the sword men

who had no wrong done to us, and to ignore the screams of women and their young as we torched their groves and slaughtered up their kine

to make sacrifice of them to our God, as Abraham slew his son.

My first night I did not bivouac where the cloying decay of blood stench sickened the sand but kept to myself in the castle, and in the very stones did see my own tomb. That night wept out my youth.

I gauged that night, my soul puff out, dispersed to air like the spores of fairy rings.

Far worse to lose a soul than heart.

AMRIAM

It made a man of you, so must we all become. You should thank me…

BALDORF

This was no way to come to manhood. Manhood might better keep its crossed secrets. To disembowel innocents, many unarmed; for Saladin's men were far that day, arranging to come upon us.
I saw men better than we.
They whom we slew are more than we; they have what the Greeks had, mathematics, philosophy, libraries…

AMRIAM

Who prosper by the nobles' gifts…

BALDORF

Yes; but theirs are fair. They do protect those others who differ, and welcome them, whilst we cut down sans mercy those who are strange to us, whose gifts fill us with covetousness.
Syria, the Holy Land, what farce, it is a profane land of stain, escutcheoned by our cross pride.
In the crusader strongholds:
Wood walls in stone, checks above the mantle. A pretty place to hide.
What use to kill Jews and Arabs as heathens on the way, as the Lion himself did do, pinioning quails as if they were falcons, pitiful?

MIRELDA

What did you see?

BALDORF

The worst fear of dream makes itself manifest and real: forced marches of infidel prisoners, Mohammedan and Jew alike, where their bodies swayed back and forth like water, like willows in the wind, so weary they dropped down and dropping they were burnt alive. I saw the skin peel back on one, a woman in her fertile years--and unwrapped there the love and wisdom, skills and gifts within her made adrift to smoke.

My tears fell at that injustice, that this before its time was taken from the world unshared. How can not this unfair thing, this ogrous guilt impinge upon all men and kings?
(Aside)(Strange return; I see myself as I was, and like me not. The expectations of a sunny hall and gold are turned to shade and dross. The alchemist of days has changed this place, and memory and mettle. I see myself from out myself with different face.)

AMRIAM

Your self-abjuring is a boy's wail.
These infidels have done no wrong, save to fail in the worship of our Lord who justifies all.

BALDORF

..who will not cleanse me for my sins nor yours, for it is you who caused the staining of my soul and made me to uncork the blood of those who haunt me 'til the grave, wilt mingle with my death-wine.

AMRIAM

No more than mine is stained. Now we are equal brethren as you are blooded by Jerusalem's black rock.

BALDORF

No God nor woman shall cleanse me, and you have both, though I espere your love is not as hollow as that faith the priests do bear.

AMRIAM

Blaspheme not of God.
We see the dross my love is in the blue fire of time.
Thee might stamp that pagan coarseness down with thy proper God, even as you put the infidel to our demands…

BALDORF

…and take his riches for our lands.

MIRELDA

What would content thee, as a sop for years which suppurated out your dalliance, and put on age for youth?

BALDORF

My lands would content me. My guardian the baron broke my last mettle by dying

AMRIAM

Then you have heard?
(Suspicious) But how?

BALDORF

Dire events travel on the lips of windy men.
I would have spoken to him once to find my true condition**,** to tell him he was good to me and made me know honor, if not duty.

AMRIAM

Your lands?

BALDORF

As you by honor promised me five years past.

AMRIAM

Those lands are confiscate.

BALDORF

Confiscate? Wherefore? I have served my indenture to your cause.
What? For envy of a queen who loves but thee?

AMRIAM

You had ever claimed a tenantry without rent, some acres for your sheep and oxen, some few servants, beehives, and had entry to my woods as Warden to them with your bells off as royal born to hunt the boar.

BALDORF

And so I did, and will do now; what's this to do with my inheritance?

AMRIAM

There was a first born who had title to your baron's fief.
See, that was I. Your baron was my father's brother, as you know.

BALDORF

What say you, that you are not your father's son, but are a bastard of the Baron Guillme?

AMRIAM

Nay…

BALDORF

That I am the bastard then of your progenitor the king! Then it is true, these many years unknown.
So If I slay you, I will be the throne.

AMRIAM

If you slay me now, you will be done ere leaving castle keep.

BALDORF

How long have you known and why kept it secret, like a baleful dog his bone?

AMRIAM

To keep you unaspired to kingship in your hopeful plots!
Now no one may prove your line save I--though you might claim a reign, t'would be a knave's.

BALDORF

I have no plots save for my manor's earth, nor reigns save for my ox!
These are my guardians estates you confiscate, rightfully mine!

AMRIAM

Your absence forfeits them to me, an ancient right of escheat.

BALDORF

My absence was your cause!

AMRIAM

You may win them back.

BALDORF

The five years lost?

AMRIAM

Your lands.

BALDORF

By deposing you who in his boiling jealousy hath robbed me.

It is thee who hath caused me loss of my holy trinity: my heart, my soul and now my land!

For that, be warned: I will yet feed your heart to you, and let your dogs while away your bones!

AMRIAM

Stay your passion. {This is my amercement for thy past contumacy!}

BALDORF

You have betrayed me! I have no passion save cold contempt whose foam runs from my throat to hand, an ocean and a tide of change!

AMRIAM

Then are we brothers in betrayal's ken.

Go, stay that hand, and get you to Provence to quell the Albigensians.

For the Pope requests a war.

An end to heresy.

BALDORF

Heresy. I do admire and aspire to it.

AMRIAM

The towns disengage from their rightful rulers

for the wealth of merchants and the imposition of men who read. They defy the church and princes, and the princes' arms. These obsequious compromising merchants aspire to rule themselves, make councils for their towns and guilds' communes; why even a carpet maker's son may buy his way to knighthood now! And free serfs, too?

It is rebellion, the order of the world comes down in inflammation.

BALDORF

Only love keeps the order of the world, without its need, each human would a mote be. That which is not love is merely a cake's coating. Or purgatory.

AMRIAM

Make up your mind, love is a woe or the making of the world?
The merchants will divide our arms from wealth; wealth and arms have always been as one by right of God and should remain.

BALDORF

The merchants will then own both wealth and arms to scatter noblemen. What care I?

AMRIAM

Go to the place and make a Crusade there.
Slay these merchants, Cathari and princes who ally against the Pope.

BALDORF

They have my sympathy.
You go, and give me back my right.

AMRIAM

My advisors say I cannot go, lest chaos overwhelm the land, for this man Montfort, have you heard tell of him? Would wrest my rightly power from me by his conspiracies. Montfort forms armies -- of singers, peasants, princes to come at me from out the hinterlands.
(Pause)
Go and gain the glory which by rights are mine, by proxy, and I shall not show you envy, but reward you with estates beyond the ones I confiscated.

BALDORF

What bonds your word, as of yet you have shown yourself a hound of hell?

AMRIAM

What would you like to take to prove my word is honorable?

BALDORF

Give me Mirelda as my concubine.
For here is the truth! I would have longed for you to bring a Lethe on me, to with your body, resuscitate me as Christ himself was once reborn, and to make me live in earth again by flesh a real thing again, and not a clothed ghost. But you nay'd me.

AMRIAM

Take your attentions off of her.
She has no interest accrued to you. Usurer of hearts. Though she may long..(*MIRELDA makes a hand motion to deny that*)… and I see her so do, she is mine.

She is my wife and queen, even if compromised; this is impossible. It is ill chosen this to voice once more…

BALDORF

Then tell the Pope to fight his wars himself. He hath drained out the coffers of so many of his states by his Crusades were he to wage another on his own kind, it would end ill. The mass would cast the church out.

(Turns to go, then turns back to MIRELDA.)

Would you go with me had I lands? Would you have gone had I not been a farmer content to till, but conqueror to plant men in the ground and take their spoils as my harvest? Was that what I
lacked to make you turn your back upon this man and run with me in love? Beware, this man will use you ill.

MIRELDA (doesn't answer)

(We hear beyond shouting : "The world is ending the world is ending; we will all be chosen for judgment; Christ will return; we will be punished for our sins!")

AMRIAM

See the procession of the heretic monks. Let them scourge themselves and die.

(Takes out a scroll)

Here it is, by the Pope's decrees for your bravery in Egypt, this commission is upon thee and to refuse is to be hung.

BALDORF

I say, let us learn from the Arabs, and wear our clothes looser in luxurious caftans, and let our ladies not be seen at court, but mostly let us by learning unloose the tonsured friars from our flesh, and see **them** as the infidels, full of fair deceit.

AMRIAM

In a moon's time full will I equip thee for a passage to Lombardy, with knights and swords to take the heretic!

Scene 2

A week or so later.

BALDORF/MONTFORT with his followers and advisors somehow indicated with only the few actors we have. Goes to a round table assembled in another castle indicated with a few different props against the turned castle wall, and a golden mystical light. The actors who are there are cloaked or wear knight's helmets, and are bathed in the light so their features cannot really be seen.

BALDORF

Like Arthur's men, my barons are my equals. Let none pretend a rule. Here in the Prince of Lugh's bright palace at the table round.

BARON

A fair leader deserves to be a king, first among equals then.

BALDORF

I would not be the imposter. I may be fair but am not born for rule, second in my line.

BARON

Then make ye first by a sharp blade.

BALDORF

Let us join in the runic circle and entwine our swords for victory!
The king has allied me with thee further. He hath adjudicated my lands away for a debt I do not owe.

(BARON AND EARL make noises of how unjust this is)

BALDORF

This injustice twained with his contempt enflames and boldens me. If he is a sword to prick at justice then I must sheathe him without mercy, and wish I could.

EARL

Let us form a plan to gorge him in his own inflammatory faggots.
Let us be cold to burn him hot, and anneal his iron to the bronze of a death mask.

BALDORF

Let the plan be just or we will change a crown of thorns for one of scorpions.
The king will relinquish Baron Guillme's estates to me.
He sets a snared meat so that I come to hand.
He set me off his hand to slay Cathari..

BARON

But it was Hippolyte whose friars brought you hence secreted, a year before your banishment was served full.

BALDORF

I owe him naught; for his favor am not bought.
Though I would prefer to stay my hand from them. They are not the enemy.
We must replace me with another Montfort for a time, confuse Amriam. Make noise of meeting at the edges of his lands, and of allying with the lands beyond. You, baron. You here, go hooded always and carry my sword. Here… my seal as well. Here.
Pretend from a distance for a time. I will finish this excursion to Provence quickly.

BARON

May the gods go with thee!

BALDORF

Let us be the pig keepers who throw branches at the oaks to get the acorns down. Feed Amriam his acorns and keep the brushes loud. Lure the boar out just so far, to tire him, and when I do return, will end him fair and call the ravens down.
I am gone upon the morrow to Lombardy.

End of Act Three

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO
CASTLE

THE FALL OF THE KING

ACT FOUR (ACT ONE)

Scene 1

BALDORF at the edge of a Lombardian town with his army shouting behind him; again do by art and sounds. Perhaps a backdrop of a medieval painting of war.
He is the only one on stage.
He is armed, chain mail, sword, off his horse.

BALDORF

I say then men, if we must make the world an infidel and kill those of our own blood and world, if we must know godly men as the cause of our eternal grief, the staying of our hands from the lambing and the hunt and farrow, then slay them. "Slay them all. God will know his own!"

(Lights indicate passing of time, as in front of a backdrop of medieval painting of war, BALDORF wields his sword and the sounds of battle are heard again.)

BALDORF

Beziers, Lyons, Navonne, Raymond of Toulouse, who like William the Singer is a spirit kin, come down in death for your good heresy against the rotten church. (Though neither their so-called heresy nor the church may tempt me; both are false idols, setting a far god against a near passion, exchanging death's ice for mortal fire.)
This is a business, is the craft of war, cool heart, and plotting brain, vision like the hawk to see all come; just heave the pike and sword and by my clever plans and by our arms, let lion lick his prey. Take down by war and siege, and by surprise the mullioned towers quake.
Yeah, catapult and charge go for the castle doors and take the fops, to by their blood, make conquered gardens grow!
Women of Provence now widowed, come with me!
It is I who know betrayal, even as Raymond and Waldo know it now. What a bitter thing to have done the Pope's crusades so well, and then be set upon by him / to do this terrible task / by a forsworn/ and hated king.
My hands are anathema to myself. What a business this war is.

Wait. The dead come to my lair. Piled up, the despair of their widows. Flaunt Amriam and pause him in his purposes; and by rebellion's allies slay those who lead this poor Crusade.
Rather than that my hands run red, instead might I win these to our cause!

Scene 2
The Castle

(Enter GWNFRITH)

GWNFRITH

(aside) I now may rise from stupor like the snake to warm spring. Now is my time to turn power to my hand.
(AMRIAM enters)
As your queen's seneschal and cousin to her blood, privy to her thoughts, and by your grace the head of household here, may I be bold and speak as if were better born?

AMRIAM

I give you leave to put your talon to my glove.

GWNFRITH

What will you give me if I help you aught more?

AMRIAM

Name it.

GWNFRITH

A child?

AMRIAM

A bastard?

GWNFRITH

Who might someday lay claim to thrones and take by power what power gives: Grievance to the meek lambs.

AMRIAM

Your sour face may curdle the milk of lust.
Your blood is not unearthed enough to be the mother to a prince.

GWNFRITH

Then who is high and who is low, that the king's seed could not redeem?

AMRIAM

What gift might give me for such a bold royal barter?

GWNFRITH

Hear me:
I have known that Baldorf, the Cathari carried home a year before his time. From them I have rumors that he is the same as this Montfort; and more, news comes that he slays them no more in Langue D'oc but instead has mutinied against you.

AMRIAM

Nay. Baldorf wins against the Cathari. He has taken Raymond's lands and will deliver them to us. I had the news a month hence.

GWNFRITH

His messenger of victory he sent you. But since has turned.

AMRIAM

I have my spies. They have not reported this. How come you by these proclamations before a King?
Can you prove these tonguings more than the serpent's hiss?

GWINFRITH

As tongued true as any royal kiss.

AMRIAM

Yet why should I let you so invade my head, lest I fall into the trap you have undoubtedly set? Baldorf is not Montfort, nor am I a cat's mouse. /He was fighting the Saracens with his sword. I had word from my men, and now he fights the Albigensians.

GWNFRITH

Think how Montfort is known for his song.

AMRIAM

As are many men.

GWNFRITH

But he is a miraculous troubadour who flutes his sounds and words soporific as Orpheus. He travels disguised from castle to castle and when he has played, he speaks of uprising to the peasants, when the masters are asleep.
He creeps into the kitchens and out through the chimneys and he arouses men to mutiny. And he sleeps with the women as he goes, turning them against their men…

(AMRIAM

And their men against himself.)

GWNFRITH

…yet e'en while he is away, his armies are jongleurs who trick upon their entry those within the house and take dominion, thus.

AMRIAM

I could believe this. Bring me proof.

GWNFRITH

Will you believe the friar Hippolyte?

(SHE gives him a letter with a seal which AMRIAM opens)

AMRIAM

The Cathar leader, one whom I aspire to root out by Baldorf's sword?

GWNFRITH

A righteous Albigensian man.

AMRIAM

(aside: How odd that a change from o to a: cothar, cathar--doth release a serf to a pretense of preference… as if a coterie garbed in cothamores of monks would by belief unbutton themselves from kings…)
From them I wist have you learned your bold parity with men. Though they scorn women as impure of soul, from Eve's first sin, they treat them the same as men in comprehension's skills.

GWNFRITH

Tis so. Woman, the acolyte, must go to men for saving.

AMRIAM

Then men hath solely God?

GWNFRITH

By the rood of kings.
Wonder: does your Queen support this perfidy and its rebellion?
See how she swooned at his return!
{aside: I wouldst twist the king against the queen, as he has seen her heart surprised by Baldorf, and heard her oft defend the poor which Montfort champions--so he may see her as his enemy!}

AMRIAM

You tell me that Montfort is Baldorf, and that he hath communion with the queen; if you have known this all along
then why not tell me when I had him in my craw--afore I coughed him out once more?!

GWNFRITH

I had only just learned this prospect.

AMRIAM (Reading the missive)

I need more than this.

GWNFRITH

Then what of these?

AMRIAM (looking)

Letters of love from Baldorf, but many years past
How came you by these?

GWNFRITH

A private chest I happenstance did find.

AMRIAM

Did find? Did steal. Then you are twice a devil.

GWNFRITH

I am alive only once, and would make of it what I can.
God will forgive me, as confession does.

AMRIAM

Where are her responses? Know you, were there any?

GWNFRITH

Yes, but have them not.

AMRIAM

Then none there are, I wager.

GWNFRITH

Wager as thou wilt. I would look elsewhere for her sin.
Having no power for herself, she gains the power of men, by having power over them.
It puts dainties to the crop of her vanity, for after all, she does no worthwhile thing.

AMRIAM

Does your queen know how her steward spies upon, despises her?
Whether she is fallen or a saint, she is your queen; does not this breaking of her trust lie ill within you, tainted, a sin against God Himself?

GWNFRITH

I weighed dishonor of the queen with that of thee, and found my care was for my king! My hate lies only in her dishonor of your holy state, none other! Indeed, I feared you would dispense with me had I the tidings brought you hence; only concern for my King in God's eyes makes me beat past a grouse's heart, contain my comely hesitance to say these things.

AMRIAM

Rise.

GWNFRITH

You and I are Christ's, yet she has not Christ's eyes to see her faults. It is hauteur's comportment makes her empty pride. What she is, or knows, is nothing, for it is only what we do which earns our keep that makes us worthy. She has no righteous gifts, nor true labor …

AMRIAM

You pass the pale..

GWNFRITH

…but in idleness may use her time conspiring against thee.

AMRIAM

Prove me this and I shall set you up a queen upon her death!

GWNFRITH

Think of how she doth defend the poor in their rebellions.
She is mad to change what God has ordered and through you is executed.

AMRIAM

Why reveal yourself Cathari to me as I might have you hung?

GWNFRITH

I would on your good auspices hang, that I have done you service.

AMRIAM

No doubt you spy for Hippolyte.

GWNFRITH

I do not.
I would you know me as I am that you might see that some Cathars are allies with this monarch who would not break away from the right order of God by rule of Kings; thus hope to stay my liege's hand by your mercy against those Albigensians who vie with Hippolyte.

AMRIAM

You play power bravely. Playing one faction against the other.
I cannot stay my hand for the Pope's sake; if not Baldorf, another emissary will choke them.
You would side with me against your own brother?
This then is true loyalty.
E'en so, they may try Christ on truer than the Pope, that's not my care. My ally is the Pope and his part of wealth with me divided.
Yet, I will reward you some-at as you wish. Tryst with me at my hunting hall in four days time.
As for instating any flourishing seed of mine in you, you must first find Baldorf and my queen complicit, and that Montfort
be Baldorf proved! Then I will catch them in my sack henceforth, and roast them, quailing.

GWNFRITH

When Baldorf returns from war you might set him on the rack to find his secrets.

AMRIAM

If he is Montfort, to wrong him thus would bring his minions down in wrath. I will set better spies about.

(Aside) I will exchange my queen’s desire for Baldorf with betrayal by her lowborn cousin; cert would rankle, and revenge is justice. This for its own sake, not trust in what you speak-- will make me try thee on!

Scene 3

MIRELDA alone in dark castle, few candles. March, Feast of the Annunciation. As she speaks, NUILLY and AMRIAM ENTER)

MIRELDA

Time turns and with her book of days, the sorrows change.
(War in Jerusalem, war in France; rebellion here; and my own house, the king whose heart I thought had comfort for me in't, has shown me a beach of barren sand of late.)
At the angels' mass the darkest midnight comes before the annunciation of the turning hours when Mary a mother suckled Christ. Waking to the shepherd's mass, I await the rod of true men for whom there is no god but the turning of the day and night, for generations, and my patrons: sun and moon, arising in the wolf's den under the wrangling roots of long-sired trees.

(Enter AMRIAM with NUILLY)

AMRIAM

What insolence is this!

AS: PEASANT (RUSHES IN)

On my knees sire, I beg to you, your squires squeeze us too hard. To serve you they lay the tax on us and we empty our hours to your coffers with little left unto ourselves. My brother beyond is sick from lack of food; my mam hath no milk for the baby at her breast.

AMRIAM

Then as the owl would suggest, stop your family's concupiscence; control your lusts if you cannot afford them. Begone or be undone! And boil acorns for her pap!

(PEASANT backs out quickly)

NEUILLY

You cannot dismiss the tenants out of hand. They make tinder for rebellion.
Having discovered Baldorf's treachery in Provence, I have assembled a force of knights to replace him under my baldric. We soon depart.

MIRELDA

Roast pig, soup, stew and bread pudding by my savings purse I made and will give the serfs their feast day!
(Follows peasant out.)
Here good man, allay thy hunger in my kitchens yon, go there down.

AMRIAM

So is this rebel Montfort also Baldorf as we suspect?

MIRELDA (re-entering)

What do you say?

AMRIAM

There are those who say you know these two as one, and aid brought, that got this rebel home before his exile done, to harry me under a different name. Even as Baldorf has turned a traitor in Provence and leaves another Montfort in his place at home.

MIRELDA

This is false! I neither aided Baldorf home, nor know Montfort, nor know the game of their exchange. This is the first I hear it.

AMRIAM

War. I am kept from it by rule.
I wouldst be the cat who loved the mouse, the hawk which plucks and then beheads, the owl which ingests the brains, and will fly stronger than my foe, mantling all his woe to gladden me.

NUILLY

You will have your time for war soon enough. The time is soon for confrontation against the Marcher lords whose dark castles set the edge of the land afire.

MIRELDA

If I may speak.
You have seen how the castle is impoverished each day, that by expenditures ensuring kingdoms and their glory, if I may bluntly reveal, the chests of the chancel are emptying; these men at the outliers mean to bleed us out, and by so sieging will cause blight amongst the quitrents who by their last efforts supply us…

AMRIAM

How know you this?

MIRELDA

Put thyself within the other's mind.
They will not plant to be robbed of seed; they put down plows; they sit with arms enfolded, and we spend more, grow poor. We are depleted. You see even this castle grow dim. Wilt make a beggar of yourself?

AMRIAM

What would you have me do instead? Let those escape who should be kept within my sheaf, thresh them out and let the chaff go with the wheat? To yield without gathering them back is to be a slack shepherd who will lose all his sheep.

MIRELDA

I would make parley with them, and hear their plights. Or suffer siege as we have been, perhaps for years; until we are bled out.

AMRIAM

I would go down upon them like the gyr to lambs and outdo their might!
Leaches.
Let me hear what you think of, yourself. You were a farmer once, until I freed you and gave you training for a horse, a knight's fee.

NUILLY

We, who were conquered by those harder of boot and with a stronger metal for their sword, were our own people once; a tribe of shepherds with no rulers.
We were set upon and downed. We must by need become practical to live, thus losing our sense of place became too humbled. Those who conquered used up much of us, and we were lessened more to compromise; put on the jerkin, and armor did take off, knelt down, be belled at our ankles lesser than our rulers, compelled to enjoy it for our bread or be always sore with discontent.
I am a farmer who has failed at the capture of the boar, or whom the boar has gored, and either way I am a lesser man, undignified in subjugation, a jester's pawn.
Am I incompetent? Or might I prove myself yet to rise? Get out from under lords' hooves to seek to man myself on my ignoble past by myself usurping other lands? If so, I will become a page, a knight's successor once again to own my worth, and thus I prove myself much better than the land which I once was--and become what has suppressed me by besting it. And take a pennant, heraldry and shield to fit my new heritage!

AMRIAM

Whoa, a philosopher.

NEUILLY

No fool as they, just logical. This is my own story told.
There is unraveling at the fiefdom's edge, the sleeve, the cuff. The merchants with the peasants unweave the kingdom, by their plain crafts thread their way to loose themselves from
rule. We can eat without lords above us they say--We can weave and cobble and sew without lords above us. They conspire to throw you off; you are merely a cloak covering their own manhood.

MIRELDA

But merciful nourishment would allay their wrath, 'tis an old saying that he who is fed will care for the provider.

NUILLY

I fear it too late for a meal to make a serf obey.

AMRIAM

Then garb me in metal and bring my closest warriors and we will out this door to those who ferment these upstart grapes to discolor the ancient wine. Take me my pennant to them, and let my sword temper its ire, drunk on their blood at last. I am sick of ruling from afar and will take matters into my own girth. Give me their blood for a repast; tinder my fire. Give me my gauntlets for a glory, now!

{He dons gauntlets, some armor, greaves, cuisses what have you. Yells outside: "To horse!")

MIRELDA (scoffing)

He mounts and with his puissance proclaimed by his heraldic flags and trumpets, wilt store me here with little fire nor food for his eager boys. You play at war while real bodies here are sore.

AMRIAM

Do not restrain me from my rights, you who have oft wronged me.

MIRELDA

You are ashes of unwisdom. I have made amends for all my wrongs. I am through listing with grievances as you know all of mine and I know all of thine. How like my dam I am.

AMRIAM

I am a man. All men in time and circumstance alike become like me. Even your lover late.

MIRELDA

I have no late lover. Save thee who dawdles before bed.
I once, one time years ago, blasted a kingly pride and blanched when cause of it returned from memory parched by time--yet you have left thy own household low for these past months.
I am soon to be brought to my own seneschal's state, privileged no more; yet it is not the lack of stature troubles me, nay nor this indignity to beg a king for food, but that he who husbands me is blind and callous as a bone.

AMRIAM

Mirelda, you are pinched like a crone when you haggle thus; there are no husbands for hags. You will be common yet.

MIRELDA

I know what commoners lack.
Bring me foods for my children and faggots for the fire or let me hunt them out myself while this Amriam-dom declines from your want of sight.

AMRIAM

I am a king and must do what is righteous, even if it kills us all!

MIRELDA

Yes, there is wisdom.

I have been out to the houses and the fields, and the times are worsening. Many are ill-nourished without strength to hoe or harvest. Illness wastes them from years of over-use. It blinds my eyes with tears to see them. It is unfair. I ask your pity. You

cannot drain them more of service. And as for your knights, they do complain to me in private, take me aside, or through the village monks tell me they groan. Look here in our larder how little is left and mice make mock of meat-flesh. Plague will come if we do not feed well soon.

AMRIAM

Where shall we gain this nourishment, from elves?
Tell me the name of any knight who maketh plaint to you. Tell me now so I may cut their ears from them.
{Now let me gorge on leather bridles!}

MIRELDA

You must cease spending. For your own sake. For wealth pines out like a lad in love and will end us all in charnel, blood from the necks of pigs.
Even the close barons with you are discontent; I hear this from their wives.

AMRIAM

I **must** enlarge the Marches, take all in who object to my supremacy by conquest. Confiscate the lands of those whose incomes I request: those who would betray me. Find this man like Norfolk did his Robin! If he be another earl of Leicester wilt thou be done with him! Then may life return to its proper wheel.

NEUILLY

None know him for who he is; none will betray him. The spies and the nobles alike turn back from us toward him.

AMRIAM

Montfort may draw men to him like some celestial burst**,** but I have the power in my mitred hand to rule men…

NEUILLY

Should we succeed to smoke him out, the fire left behind will boil the brush without him.

AMRIAM

If we but hold out, we will be refreshed with gold the church will send. For by a great irony Baldorf will, under my reign--by his first conquest of the heretics for the Pope, before he mutinied - have me replenished in gained gold by the church to garnish me soon with great armies**.**

Until then, I with my entourage will hie to the hinterlands to kill rebels and seek out this Montfort, while Nuilly's men will to Provence to end Baldorf and take all Langue D'oc for spoils.

Scene 4

Many days later.

Castle. MIRELDA with GWNFRITH at some activity: a game, or embroidery with fewer candles than previously. Time passes. Then:

MIRELDA

He was all gules upon a field of lions, not sanguine; disturbed, not quite choleric but an air of fire, earth torn up; flooded. He was winter to me, worse...

GWNFRITH

Because he deems Baldorf is Montfort and blames you for it.

MIRELDA

Falsely. I give no charity to this Montfort, nor know him.
Who's tongue passes these falsehoods?
Baldorf is at war and was.
Made to perform what he can do, though he would not. I know this thing. Will ne'er I gain the King's trust?

GWNFRITH

What matters trust? You are well cared for even in mistrust. Other kings would have had you gone.

MIRELDA

Are you unwell again? This pregnancy will be a curdled misconception unless you honey your whey.
It grows dark.
Light up the candles left, and let me worry for my husband. A week's journey, a tourney quickly to the hilt of it he said.

But he is late. What would my fate be were he a dead man, captured by rebellers or by merchants whom he herds; suppose the sheep play with the dog to ransom him?

I have no gold, save from my father's lands themselves which may be forfeit if he wars against my husband.

Hide in the twists and turns of this bold castle's secret curves… (would it were my husband; it would know stone sense.)

GWNFRITH

Quell your anxiousness; put its flame down, cut your wick and lick not your self-pity into higher flames.
You are my equal now in lack.

MIRELDA

Is it thee who fits these falsehoods to the King? To what end? He has no faith in thee, as little as he has in me!

GWNFRITH

Faith and more he has in me, and he keeps me though you would let me go, for I do good while you are…

MIRELDA

What am I? I have seen your sourness to me afore and figure it for women's irritable causes.

GWNFRITH

I am the wood and you are merely flame!

MIRELDA

Without which you could freeze soon enough…
And like the concealed log which yet burns your flames leap up at me. Why for?

(We hear noises of AMRIAM returning; it is now dark. He enters, dirty and blood stained.)

AMRIAM

Give me ale, women, if there be any left pregnant in kegs below. Let this fire be increased.

(GWNFRITH puts a few thin sticks on for there is nothing to make it higher with.)

MIRELDA

What has the day brought, Amriam?
Dimiss this, so we may speak in private!

AMRIAM

The day has brought thought.
I will keep her here; why must you be discourteous!

MIRELDA

I sans courtesy? Not this one who chooses to niggle me like a flea?
The day has brought thought? It has brought acts and revelation…

AMRIAM

Yes. God, how I love a killing. It puts the thought to deed, like a man's point pressing to his woman and seals the wax of fate to its page, and the man is done, he is entered to the light and sent to dark, his passage in between no more than parchment to its holding; put in and taken out and burnt. And the rebellion's solved, the upriser's wife pleads, his children sob at my knee, and another man comes to soothe them in an hour; and the upriser is forgot no matter his goodly deeds. No wonder the lion licks his roe deer with love between his paws.

MIRELDA

No penitence, no conscience for his death and for his kin?

AMRIAM

Be closed off with your words; they impatience me. For you know little of the outside world. A man's fate is what he draws himself by the points he makes. It is done. I take my steel off; five peasants will grow flowers in the spring from where they lay. I have pricked many with death's consummation.

I muse on what I've gained and what I must next do. Speak not, lest I be distracted. Why should a regent be bent low by a woman in any means? Ambition should satisfy our every want.

If we fight simply for our names, what will satisfy the future? Shall we then fight for women to gain them by our prowess, first our mothers, then our flirts--or to impress our names upon the flesh of the future? What is a line of sons for to carry your name? Why, for immortal glory! What is a sword for? To cast that fame for sons and selves. This every risk adores!

Scene 5

Almost six months later.

September 29, Michaelmas festivities. (AMRIAM, NUILLY and GWNFRITH, taste the treats on the tables. Hanging up Michaelmas daisies, flowers and bags of goodies for the peasants.)

AMRIAM

This year's Michaelmas is richer than before from the exchequer's revenue chambered from the Lombardians gained by that short war shriven first by Baldorf and then by thee, loyal Nuilly, whom I have well rewarded**.** Is he still uncaught?

NUILLY

He eludes. Our spies post a reward.

AMRIAM

So be it for now.

My bursar and steward hath traded with the townships and the lords, and with our gold they have purchased fabrics, gems of glass and thick encrusted metals, and cabochons and cabinets-- some local hewed, some plundered from the east --and furs from further north, and sold these once again to other princes for more gold, and with that gold employed more men, making them from pages into knights, dispensing land from out my fiefs to them as well, that they in turn may warden it. I pay artisans well to supply me and send the coin around equably by my purchases. None should have complaint.

{GWNFRITH

See they gather to do homage.

AMRIAM

Here we will give the peasants alms and wine and take their minds off what they do and yearn for--with our presence. In us sublime, let them see themselves; their glory in my pride; as their king and leader I am what they admire--for they aspire to please me and in that pleasing, following God's leader as am I to follow Him alone, are grown content.}

Here they come to my portcullis.

(He exits the castle hall and speaks stage front to us---to them.)

AMRIAM

Understand that what you sacrifice in sweat and shearings from your sheep and spinning yarn and wheat, is for the good of God and I God's emissary here on earth.

These infidel people do their own souls harm/ and jeopardize our own. Their evil tyrannizes those below; and though Mohammedans have chivalrous Saladin, he is the enemy of faith and by bloody sin has risen to his place, even as the heretics do in closer lands.
Our knights' sacrifice in foreign lands or against the Albigenisans is great; slain or wounded, they are heroes drawn on heaven's gates; for they have nobly served to save the heathen from himself, and by his going magnify our greatness! Your sacrifice enhances heaven in your sights!
On two fronts slowly the rampant battles move.

(AMRIAM re-enters the hall)

GWNFRITH (to Amriam)

Let the Michaelmas goose be fed to our king to fatten prosperity, and too the Michael cakes filled with brambleberries and the wild honey, by sacred oak and rowan heated, give to the peasants.
I must speak with you.

AMRIAM

Take heed.
You have given me not the exchange for which I bred you. No proof that this my consort doth betray me with Baldorf. Nor is it proved that he is Montfort!
Yet as that bastard grown within your skin will soon give out its grape, and your husband none the wiser is, nor my just wife, I will not instate him when he is of age! You are cold white fruit fermented and I the hot red wine. Too different to give your seed height!

(To audience aside)

I played this maid to keep myself at distance from my own heart lest I begin to trust what could undo me. {For though she has been a wife rich in pleasures and loyal since those many years past, she hath not my recent trust, nor ever again will.}

(to GWNFRITH)

Fetch her Ladyship.

GWNFRITH

Wilt tell her?

AMRIAM (aside)

Will toy with both of you for sport. Faithless women, yea, the sin of Eve will ever play for consummation.

(Exit GWNFRITH returning with MIRELDA, he gives MIRELDA a goblet. Clinking glasses by the fire.)

MIRELDA **(**to Gwnfrith**)**

Thee and thy husband's soon born, by its stars does it do well?

GWNFRITH
Well, by Scorpio moon infused to the Virgin. His future will ascend.

MIRELDA
May it not have a jealous and dishonest disposition, a changeling's temperament, nor witchcraft practice by the fens.
(AMRIAM motions to GWNFRITH to leave. He raises a goblet.)
You do celebrate? What thing of joy may link us?

AMRIAM
"The fire, both hunger and consumption, is."
It is colder than the gleam in an owl's eye in spite of it.
What say if I told you something?

MIRELDA
Take me to your trust.

AMRIAM
That I betrayest thee.

MIRELDA
In what, since that I have no secrets nor do thee?

AMRIAM
You have been honest with me, should I be with thee?
No, I jest; sometimes a secret is more noble, and a lie the best of hopes.

MIRELDA (lightly)
There is another in your heart? Be open with me lest worry's inquisition inquire of me daily.
I have always feared it: my fair fate.

AMRIAM
As I have a hound for boars, a beagle for hares, a dog for birds, and each a method to hunt them; a stallion for war, a mare to travel with, a gelding for jousts and garlands, one to race, and one for prettiness alone, why should I not have wenches for each day?

MIRELDA
Who is she? Some airy wench of the town, as pale as I am dark?

AMRIAM
She is not. Nor could she ever be--as honest as you once were with me.

MIRELDA

What a woman’s fears are, are mine, all. I dream nightly that for my former acts, I find him in another’s bed. That is the inevitable day all women dread. (And I of those I did desire, suspect always that they would better love one royal born, and richer, with a fairer skin, not lesser than myself in all their gifts.)

End of Act Four

ACT FIVE (ACT TWO)

Scene 1

BALDORF outside the castle, playing music as he speaks:

BALDORF

Stretched to her strings the Christmas light, the nine day feasts, the feast of Stephan and the miracle plays, the jugglers in the stalls--Saint George himself, a Michael over dragons' mums-- the wind and haze of changing months: the pear and harvest, scent of tart wine and grassy corn;
sleek wet soil, the supple woods, oak trees like black bones
and the boar within; the words of rhyme no match for chords; captured is the ignorant gale, the frail rabbit in its form.

Thus, with my lyre and shawm will the new tones of Arabs play, to conjure those exotic faces: the dry heat, the desperate sands, the houris and the princes' tales of genies.
This is my comfort, the sounds a perfect marriage for my heart, and none I need but the far journey's woods, a dog to hunt with, and this instrument.

Is this the Lady of the lake? I need to pull no sword from stone, but better,
may lead men with song.

(Lights up on MIRELDA and AMRIAM.
BALDORF sings to them from beyond the castle.)

BALDORF

(voices from beyond accompany him with various medieval instruments.)

Ladies and lords, princes and cottagers
Would you rather have your soul for a day
Than the riches of hell
When the bells of the king's churches peal
Is it for wealth they steal your goods or God?
Will the princes rise on your granaries' prize?
Will you be impressed to fight in the east,
When the sun in the west is your home?
Will the church and the rulers make deaths of your
Life?
Let you husband and wife, take your pride in hand
And follow this band to the woods.
We live on meat; we will steal the gold.
We will rise against castles and free their holds!
Onward, our brotherhood!

AMRIAM

This is heresy or worse yet, rebellion, who singeth there?

(ENTER) BALDORF

You know who I am, as I know you.
I come with my cloak off. It grows easier to put down men. Especially the holy ones.

AMRIAM

You will at last be hung. GUARDS!

BALDORF

Your scullery was made quite open to me; the door parted, and I was in with two score of my men who by psaltery and unpsalmed sword may sing their way to heroism. They wait below to rise into your chimney or your chancellery.

Listen well.
You have long wondered of Montfort.
Wonder no more. For I am he!

AMRIAM

Then play your chess. I guess you come to have my head. Then I shall fight thee!

BALDORF

No. I come not to slay you, nor to take as much a share from you as you have done from me. Though it is all my heart to put you to the point and see you bleed out. Only the lady at your side stays me; only fair chivalry allows me mercy.

AMRIAM

Guards!
Where be my guards?

BALDORF

Annointed by men. There are none here to intercede. Your knights were lured afar and now are held by hordes who carry naught but sticks; outnumbered and deserted they are taken to the field at Chain Fen where fires all about
do keep escapers in. They are fed well, and none are harmed. But will be tried for crimes, as you.
Hear.

AMRIAM

I shall hear nothing from a usurper!

BALDORF

My barons (who redeemed me from my shame for my coin of deeds) have decided this— e'en your wife's sire!: Relinquish confiscated lands, and give back gold in equal shares. Tax not the peasants more. But be conformed to law. Let the council of barons

with common men from shires each a two, rule by agreement of consensus as the Witan clans once did.
You king, will chain yourself to law, and law will shield these lands from grief. This is your quit rent to be released. Justice at last at hand! Or else resign the kingship and go forth as other men; no more, no less.

AMRIAM

Law! What law!
This convocation is unlawful in God's eyes. You are a traitor to the line, your own and mine!
You would give men to their self-rule, expect no (anarchy) (dissolution)? Men are just fools, their betters must be guides.

BALDORF

Your catechism fails these times.
You have no choice. You are my prisoner.
My half brother or bastard brother or cousin or king, or man or demon, my enemy; such you have taught me: It is the art of war by which we restore men's rights or take them.
Though if we put this parliament to settings, we may demand reason as our guide for future lines.

AMRIAM

And my moats?

BALDORF

The bridge is cut. You are a captive though your men assemble in the fighting fields beyond. They are encircled by my princes and their men.
I am one of many hills, none other than.
He who is first among equals and leads them has no need to be a king.
Now see how arbitrary my authority is for you, and like it well.
As you imprison for no cause, so I imprison you. As men are killed for sport in jails for corruption's sake to steal their lands, so I have taken what is yours. By right of justice, do **I** escheat your lands!
As men are sent to war for naught, so I take yours; and let you learn your lessons well:
That justice sometimes is revenge.

MIRELDA

Montfort, if such you are, you said at our last meet that you have concern for no man.

BALDORF (nasty edge)

You reckoned up words and listened well? Then I am flattered or still have hope of love.
For no man concerned, but that compassion is a principle which warmeth me like some are warmed by mead. It is not the man, but men.

AMRIAM

Your nonsense aside, my men will find thee out and come upon thee.

BALDORF

They will not lest thy only precious treasure of thy line be put out!

AMRIAM

My sons! Where are my sons?

BALDORF

Taken to a castle o'er the marshes path, near the long kneed and skinny howling sea.

MIRELDA

Baldorf. My sons! My twinned flesh and soul. How could you take them thus?

BALDORF

I stole one as your maid took him to the stable this cold morning, easily enough. I was unsuspected. I told him who I am.

AMRIAM

And what was that?

BALDORF

That I am his progenitor.

MIRELDA

And his response?

BALDORF

That none save Amriam begat him, and was he loyal to his king. It broke my soul.
So few his years, yet spoken nobly.
I could not convince him. Though I showed him in the glass his countenance and mine.

MIRELDA

This then is your cause for frozen heart to me.

BALDORF

How could I, considering it for years at war, relent? A woman who loved me took my child to another man. Were I she I would have followed my love like the leper and the blind unto the hardest lands. /Were it not for you I would not have been twice sent to two Crusades my heart resented. /I returned to
save you from this dreadful king, as in the romances that we sing,
And found you were not in distress, but loved him.

MIRELDA

He is a man.

BALDORF

And am I not?

MIRELDA

Perhaps more than.

BALDORF

The other son, born to you both alone, is with his brother.
Safe.

MIRELDA

(My heart is pressed *peine forte and dure* between these men, why should I love more to be so scorned?)
Then you did go to the Saracens or were you Montfort all the while?

BALDORF

I did as I have told you months ago.
Although your vile seneschal offered then to hide me..

AMRIAM

You aided him against my will?

GWNFRITH

He lies so as to cast doubt on what he knows I may bring out…

BALDORF

..but I scorned cowardice, and feared her piety of venomous plots.
(TO MIRELDA) In first fire of memory I wrote to you, and thrice again at Yules.
But once embarked and disembarked upon the Cyprian soil, thence to the Holy Land whence the desert made a desert of my heart, the hot winds swept me clean. I saw women whose men were kings, and they were less than camel-herders under stars. They kept the market when were not at war.

When the streets ran with blood knee deep for Christ, I wondered at my plight-—that it was less than naught---for love, to grow weak for love? Why? When men were crazed to fight and die--for nothing; and all around me were. I wanted to live on, though unsure why. Just for revenge, and to return, and this I did.
For many of your men who kept me watched in war and sleep were pillaged, plundered, murdered for their lack of mercy steeped in their own red gore. And I alone was left; the Saracens had spared me, sensed me less impassioned for conversion of their kind than your dead men, and they had heard my lute.
Thence made my way alone then after four years at war, to a jute-sailed dhow and paid my way in plunder to these shores, where taking up another name, Montfort, I planned what I have come to do and done. Your lady seneschal put me to the vessel through her Albigenisan monks with whom some Templars
made a bond, and by secret notes guided my way back a year before my time.

AMRIAM

And you, with her, Cathari?

BALDORF

You sent me to beset the men who coveted my loyalty, Cathari; but I betrayed them as I said I might for thee. Then I thee better betrayed to set the fates right— (allied with them, only to fight -- but to their cause owe no plight.)
That is the story. I am Montfort tonight.

AMRIAM

So now you know the meaning of the sword, of power cold and without heart-heat, hammered, annealed. Be proud then: Survive and conquer is the meaning of a man.

MIRELDA

(has gone up to the balcony unnoticed)
Where is my woe to throw down at you who will so own a woman's fate?
Love is a calumny, calamity, to conceive a child and in its sweet conception achieve merely a chaos. It is your child and not the king's, you say Baldorf, finding assignation with the child's eyes and HE denies thee -- but this King has cared for me withal, in spite of all his wrongs to other men and women. I rooted in his crag's gravel, and nourishment took me on, my fruit changed to his hue; nursed thus on him, took a false strength, but still a husk for my skin. I loved him for his surety, as I loved thee for all thy competence and art and gentleness and bravery and grace before thou too wert by time indeed beaten differently; and now I am bent in twain for guilt, like the tree which cast two trunks into the ground from axe and fire. My actions have my lambs undone. And you both cast me down a cutting to trample for old wine.
What will you do with him, oh man now base who once was wondrous kind?
(Almost mad with grief)
My heart tears from within, I can hear its fabric boil like the spitting fire or rain as the silk strains.
The thorn, the underbrush which in the wilds clings to the trunks, bedevils me. Had I done this or that, would this be now?
Shall I throw myself from here and with the death of me give back my sons to us!

BALDORF

I will not harm them, save that your king harm me--but keep one for my son, when this battle is done.

MIRELDA

And the other one?

BALDORF (Not answering, then)

Do you think a man needs not a son? A son to fight his battles by his side, to train to justice; to keep him in his countenance when he has left this life, to carry on the line? I crave a son, yet you denied me issue.

MIRELDA

Do you think not a mother needs a son, to care for that he grow and care himself for others as a man?

And in my loneliness what could I do, wait for you in isolation in the rose of time see blight, watch my own breasts curl to ashes, and my womb issue forth a dry pod?

You make paragons of your love and yet by now that which exists should have pricked you to the core and gone.

Have you stayed pure?

How account for loneliness which oft cuts to my fingers' very bone--for the king loves me and I love him, but he will never

give me trust, and at my own acts I suffer, always out of reach to that true faith which man and wife may mate.

BALDORF

This you would have had with me, matched like the lamb's wool to its skin, not sheared off, but heating us through every strife. And only thee.

This man has spurned you for a low wench.

MIRELDA

(through tears)

He has his privileges. His *droit de seigneur*. Yet he returns. more passionate for leaving.

I would be a hawk whose jesses bring her back to one who masters her, but none console my hackles, but though they klept me to admire and hold up, will not stay close.

Will not allow me what allow themselves.

AMRIAM

And I? What of myself? Is "law" all you wouldst crave

to ransom me back one son at least, the true one of my seed!

BALDORF

Vouchsafe your lands to me, release your knights from fealty and tell them to desist in war on us. Obey a law which common men will with their princes make, yea, and also give the coffers of their gold from wheat entailed to each one.

If not, I will imprison you for life and take by force what you could donate with a changed and generous heart.

AMRIAM

Mm. It seems you want the world.

BALDORF (to men beyond)

Imprison them!

MIRELDA

Let us remain hostages in our own domain. There is no need to dungeon us. Show mercy as you ask for it.

BALDORF

I will take your husband as the lion to his cage. He will stay within this keep; you will see without the tents upon the field with my armies circle this. He will know no harm, but be a hostage as his heirs are to assure the change.
You may stay here as you wish. Both alone.
Your lady seneschal has her choice, as she is treacherous we know this, let the serpent lie.

GWNFRITH

I am not treacherous. I am a good woman.
T'was I told you that the king's son was his and not yours and that she had abandoned you for Amriam, and so you stopped your missives, and her bold heart broke not.

You both mislaid your heart in her, that hath no cause
Save her own!

MIRELDA

You snake upon a gules of a boar's tusks. What gave you the right to decree my fate undiscoursed by my truths!

GWNFRITH

I am the better woman; and was and always was, in spite of my position at my husband's bench. I work and pray to Christ, and what do you? You, repose's strumpet, I am the mortar of this dead castle or I was, without me nothing would be done. The lady's woe in leisure, the stabler's brush, the time of rising and the worry of the cleaning days, all mine. Whilst you, you supervise. But are you wise, not you; you know only love and think it pain.

MIRELDA

(speechless at the betrayal)

I had no full count of your envy and your hate. Though I knew some of its change, but thought it was your moon's horns. It has as many scales as a silver serpent. You are a scorpion ablaze with ugliness. In you a tail is no pleasure but a sting which pricks a king!

GWNFRITH

Wait, I will tell you more. Your son will be put down by mine. I am going with the king. You should be taken yon to Montfort's tents, enslaved.
I am the king's maid and his mistress too and he has given me a son which in secrets burnt into my womb. It is his seed and not my husband's born.

AMRIAM

Seneschal hold your tongue!

BALDORF (to Gwnfrith)

Then my men will go to your hut and take all your spawn as well. You play chess like a lag.

GWNFRTIH

As God wills it, the babe is afar with Cathari cousins who hath milk undried. You will search hard to find them. (to Mirelda:)
For those born weak with your black guilts, my son shall rise to their inheritance.
I spit on you, you idle Druid princess proud and downed.
Be here alone and in your piteous tears do drown!
Deserve your fate by God you have disowned!

MIRELDA

I have no words for you; you will bite yourself at last and casting off your false skin will die of your own pois/on.

(To the men)

Then hear my unleisurely woe, for years now I have been twained like the great oak which by fires burned down, grows again double from the root.

I loved you both I, but had I another self, I might have loved one.
How odd that loving two should break three.
Is this so wrong to want to wife you both as men in Arab lands may do with women? A woman wrote the Mabinogen; we have as much wit as men and less of wrath; save for a rare Eleanor, we would not make the world to war.
I made amends for what came as my son, as both my sons, and put them first. And love them best, to scorn the both of you; for grown men dangle with a woman's fate while babes in innocence are few in years. Give me my sons, let them my sorrows sop.

BALDORF (softens)

My lady, I loved you once, and lady, once for me is all.

MIRELDA

Then in that love show mercy as you do for cottars, do for me, a plain woman at my heart, a simple one. Not wise.

BALDORF

But radiant as an emerald risen to the eastern sky.

MIRELDA (to Amriam)

And you, you gave her seed and now deprive me of my rights and your sons too?

AMRIAM

I gave her seed, but your sons led hers in inheritance, and though I am ashamed to speak, I loved you and had grown to see you as inseparable from all I want in all my life, for all my trying to graft you out and scar the supple wood.
Most men grow apart from wives, the bark splits and two trunks cleave yet part, their arms awaving in the blizzards' wind, but you were in my graft a bark of me, a dog lying down next to a spark.

For you I might give up my fealties for him. Think on it and then in calm proclaim, what have me do? I am tired of ambition; simplify and pass the crown to Baldorf, let him try it on, and I be him and he be me? What say?
Or shall I fight you Montfort at a joust and in the blood of both be all worlds lost?

MIRELDA

Begone, both; and let me beat my head upon the stone; it grows cold and do it tear my flesh with woe, despise all men as summer to ice might, or goodly nature may the axe. Let me suffer me alone till wisdom comes. My plight is none so bad as those who die for pointless conquest of the Saracens or for a haughty Pope, yea e'en the Albigenisans who take my pity in spite of all their false hopes; and my crusade and yours is laid to rest; what justice is there if e'en the best may be corrupted? Give up your crown for him? Make more blood come down?

BALDORF

I am not corrupt.
My soul will set ablaze the firmaments with music even as my flesh rots.

MIRELDA

Speak not to me. Let you lie down with this dour whore who had your ear. Take all her other points of openness, and swear your troth to her.
You are not good enough to lead, and nor is he.

BALDORF

I never lay with her; t'was only your king who did so. She merely by her Cathari spies led me home a year before my exile due.

AMRIAM

I will not take this woman with me, this low born cat who aids my foes and plays me for a fool.
All kings cast seed upon the wind. But I love one, for all my lies, that is one truth.
Disown this unbred mewling thing, for practicing treason by bringing Baldorf home.
(Points to GWNFRITH) Take her to her hut beyond.

BALDORF

I will.

GWINFRITH

May all your hearts be cleaved glass and the crass sea swallow you before Hell doth.

Scene 2

Castle

Windy and grey. Perhaps a sea beyond.

BALDORF and MERCHANT AND FOLLOWER

MERCHANT

These tapestries, these ermines and velvets might we trade with France and Italy for fortune. These spoils for the artisans: furniture and iron wrought, and sculpture and jewelry in cloisonné and gems, look how wondrous; and the miniatures, the books of days the calendars some stolen from the monks, with illuminated letters all in gold, look, we might gather and horde, enrich ourselves for all our effort…

BALDORF

Or, staying our hands' hunt, could distribute equal spoils when traded to the city states afar for gold; and by that gold supply ourselves, each one of high and low us, for lifetimes.

MERCHANT OR FOLLOWER

You should be our king, you have saved us; proven that we need no Amriam.
Let us crown you.

BALDORF

Temptation by ambition stains the soul and changes it. Were I to be a king I would oppress as limitless rulers do; the thing itself creates the contraption which embroils.

FOLLOWER

See here how the merchants amass their wealth. No wonder they flaunt the church and compare their wealth to its.
With the merchants to sell and the artisans' guilds allowed, the marketers will supersede the church, and farmers will be in between again. Then perhaps we should hold the merchants hostage.

BALDORF

The merchants.
Go you to it; recruit them even more to our cause. Start with this one here.
The king refuses to confirm our council and legitimate it by his seal.

MERCHANT

Then deligitimate him; set his head down to your sword, and on its plate see your reflection as the rightful ruler, for you are just. And take his queen to you.
We cannot continue; either we behead this man and set you in his place, or make him listen to our laws.

BALDORF

He is imprisoned in this castle and kept close unto his lands. We must about this business: Take the king out of his chambers. Let some men occupy his balcony rooms; let himself and the queen live in the hall only.

ACT SIX (ACT THREE)

Scene 1

Winter

A hovel, a month later. (Again, Turn a piece of the castle to the hovel.)

MIRELDA, GWNFRITH, a figure in bed.

GWNFRITH

I have called for you that you forgive me, and am glad you have brought the king.
I see beyond Baldorf's guards in courtesy accompany you both**.** What a downfall for a bird of such high wing.
I pity you and you must pity me.
I have only been in this life close to she who bore me and here she lies. This white winter has bleached the flesh from her; this white winter has no cream but is the pale plight of paucity and illness which it brings, cold and pale as the sea spume
and now the first spring will be better than December in which your curses make me live eternal cold.
Mother I wish I had done better by thee; I wish you were not slaked by poverty and losing your few pretty things which a hard life accrued to you, brought down by men who hunt you for the sake of me.
My Queen, since your husband would disown me from your household, and Baldorf despises me who now owns your castle, I throw myself upon your mercy. My husband has of late died.

(MIRELDA nods, she has heard of it.)

My mother lies ill. Of kindred, brothers, sisters, few are left and wander with the buskins well beyond this shire.
My son whom your king has disowned at your behest is also ill. We suppurate like Jesus
himself, and cannot be reborn. The spirit is our wish, the matter stains, and there is only good and evil in the world; but matter must we have for food or we shall perish. We have no seed to plant, though we have ploughed the ground; this cold, sunless, budless earth-- and the lack of stores….I am raked with the thorns of my ill deeds; they eat me and
I eat the snow.

(Enter AMRIAM):

AMRIAM

Cathari, live on spirit! Let them care for you! Let you worm within my realm, live on spirit. Why should the flesh occur to you a worry? Practice your beliefs!

GWIFRITH

My husband had found us out before he passed.
Cathari cast me down, t'was wonder I was not stoned! E'en my own half brother Hippolye…

AMRIAM

Get rid of her.

MIRELDA

I should feel as you do for her past wrongs**,** yet recent sorrow hath recanted rage.
Her son is your decanted flesh. You are no longer king to order.
I have seen the boy. Who could but love him, though his begetting be by tempest's wombs.

AMRIAM

He is a blight which issues from this witch's confusion.

MIRELDA

How can you have no heart in hunger, when you have hungered? How can you continue bitter as the hard unriped nut? The mast will rot, and your acts turn to teeth against your flesh. Be kind; I have forgotten anger towards this woman even in an hour; for in our imprisonment is everything a sorrow, and in that compassion comes. Too, I have won some kindness and concession, some days from thee…though you turn round like the moon in love who are so steady a sun in wishing war…and still I suffer for my babes kidnapped.
Lift the banns of anger; let us all who share blood and suffering and a mortal story at the same time in the world be reconciled each one to each; and in our poor estate at least know peace.
As she is brought down by Castle's poverty, we follow swiftly to the ground and have no den which is not bared by Montfort's men.
(To GWNFRITH)
Woman, when we were maids, and I remember when, so long ago, so bright and young, you were my elder playmate. My mother and your mother were admired of each; one for her high born beauty and her generous soul, the other for her strength and loyalty. Your mam was midwife to my birth.
(To the MOTHER FIGURE in the bed)
Here old woman, it is I the queen. I sorrow for your pains, and tell thee this if in your near death you mayst hear: Your daughter once was good to me; I know not what had changed her.

I am no Albigensian to see all in dual, black and white. No heretic am I, nor no believer. (Gods hath better things to do than worry for the fate of martyred queens.) As music has more tones than two, so do our lives. And as you speak a whisper in my ear to bless me, eldest mam, I vow I will not hurt your daughter, nor will see her starve. For the sake of what was once my innocence!

GWNFRITH

How can I repay thee? Mirelda the merciful needs no Mary to teach her kindness. Wilt forgive me for my wickedness?

MIRELDA

And thee perhaps of mine.

Envy clasps itself on even those we friend, and feeds itself voluptuously; and it is not your fault, but circumstance of birth and talents given.
I shall feed thee as I can in scarcity, for once you were my friend, when we were virgins born--and take your mother healers at the nonce.
Here take my last purse for this purpose, and we will be poor together.

AMRIAM

Go hence, Mirelda and do then as you please; this woman has my son and flesh, and though a thorn was nonetheless once housled by the king. Give her our mercy, then, such as is left at hand----and be done with it.

MIRELDA

Fast forgiveness lives in women, for we know sorrow simply as we be women and we age; let sorrow forgive sorrow and be done with rage.
`

Scene 2

At home in canopy bed taken out of chamber, now in main hall.

AMRIAM

The king's chamber brought within the hall, what a downfall.
Even the winds make owl calls to mourn it.
All things came easy to me that now are made hard.
It is impossible to unaccustom me to rule and to command, now a serf to these guards.

MIRELDA

I cannot sew, embroider, nor bake sweet pastries in the kitchen down.

AMRIAM

They keep us to our room while they do imprison others or much worse.

MIRELDA

I have thought it out: you once offered to exchange your crown with him. Get me back my babe.
Go with Monfort's council and be changed.

AMRIAM

(looking out the door or window)

Look how one comes to fester us with searching. But see from hall and chamber they both exit below to the scullery. Yes, the sea surge of snow would keep us here; they know that-even unguarded.

MIRELDA

Milord, I require your affections now more than in days past; they comfort me. At least answer my thought.

AMRIAM

Men find our innocence in your mouths, thus when you are sullied by the hands of men, we are undone. There is naught to say. For we go from men we joust with, to cleanse in bosoms such as yours. When those private places are invaded by the other's arts, we are quite alone, bereft of chaliced shade.

MIRELDA

Now then I feel my guilt. It is not god's contempt, but mine, unkempt.
But let the past be spent out of its silk, and woven, put away.

AMRIAM

In you worlds virgin beyond gods we seek, our natural past when were wanderers; when all were equal under nature's law before you women settled us for shelter's means. Yet you are nature here made raw, the tempest and the tone of spring.

MIRELDA

Then do you love me still? Or ever did? Will enduring these past trials unite us? Soothe me; this bird bates with fear.

AMRIAM

I will fondle thy feathers (he holds her) and then send you hence when we are loosed!

MIRELDA

Hence?

AMRIAM

Set the pearl back in her father's setting.

MIRELDA

No. Do not tease me now.
No. Do not do this thing. At least let me stay soft with my boys in their familiar kingdom should you win them back.
I will let thee lie with whom you choose if you but leave me here.

AMRIAM

It is for thee that this man made me enemy, why should I give you charity?
{You are an honest soul; should I not be with you?
There, you see now how honesty may oft lack courtesy.}

MIRELDA

I wanted to divulge the truth, then; not hide my heart.

AMRIAM

And you did make the truth well and vulgar known to me. I still am not convinced; is Eldreth, first born - my own?

MIRELDA

Loss of your heart, which truly I never caught complete, hurts into my flesh, a dart of hunter's to the dainty quail, a choke a snare for tears.
I dare not tell thee what could be.
In truth, now that we are at this sorry state, I know not, for I had so long ago, lain with you both.

AMRIAM

Then you HAVE deceived me. Let me cast him down for another's son. No hostage will have Baldorf of king's blood but the new king be in hiding under a servant's skirts! I'll bring him out from there.

MIRELDA

This son is yours by nourishment; tis thee who tabled him and bred him to a royal heart; have mercy for the part of you he is! Stop.

AMRIAM

Well then, the truth lays limp in my lap once known.
{My heart is rooted in dilemma, and it now weighs me, old made in a moment by too much rage.}

MIRELDA

I had thought that by their smooth bodies and breast, their souls' love can women have power over men, who oppress them.

AMRIAM

So it is for power you ensnared us both?
I *will* send you back to your sire.

MIRELDA

My father will be glad to have me, but my mother oppresseth me for the sake of my father whom she cannot oppress without fear of consequence.
Yet I love them, but distance is best for that love.
No I did not ensnare thee for power.

{That puissance which for a moment gave the animal in me pleasure, that by my nature, as a woman and an act of nature, I could so attract two worthy men, by that act of nature which my self was – even as a mountain might inspire but has no fault, no guilt neither as treasure does--
Gave way to mindfulness that power bore itself responsibility upon me;
and guilty that I might cause
both men wroth;
that through my vessel they would each
meet head on, like two stags jousting horns
and find each hurt, stopped me.
My poor men, would tender both of thee for my bad self's sake, and for your own soothing in itself, and I would make amends for my ill cosseted desires, so loose commanded,
And somehow try to find my goodness.
Thus not to a religion am I remanded
but to find what love may best confer to pain both less.
And sop and soothe the wounds of men, not blessures cause.
And blame not Fate, but my self take the cause of fault, divest;
Remediate and nurse your sorried state. This to YOU alone I do confess. Now shrive me my king and give me grace!}

AMRIAM

For your wants then did thou attempt to take power from me.

MIRELDA

Had I another self I might have loved but one. Why would any seek two loves who have in one enough?

AMRIAM

For a man? proof that I am who I am.

MIRELDA

What shall you do?

AMRIAM

Disinherit Eldreth for Gwnfrith's line.

MIRELDA

This you cannot do.

AMRIAM

I can and I will send you home.

MIRELDA

Let this fate not hang me. I am no woman on my own with none to serve; if I love thee I may cook for thee, if not I starve. I am the hound come home and need my husband, my home, my sons, and all their rightful line imperiled.
Do not be this hard with me, our jailing here is poor broth enough.
Look sorrowful with me, and hear my cry's apology. I will switch places with my own maid to stay. I say this again. (Why must possess me with such ill will--is't not enough to protect me and by experience make me yours?)
{Rather than cry at you for that betrayal with my Hagar; for I know I have no right—I have been quiet. If I accept your broken faith in me, your infidelity, can this not settle us even, stalemate at last?}

AMRIAM

Then I shall not cast you out. Come here. My stale mate.
You cleaving to me, sweeps succor to my very bones, a draught of an enchantress's brew which lets my rage renew against imprisonment. I would fly again a gyrfalcon and in scorn above stoop down upon those peers who do usurp me and make meat of them.
You are one thing which maketh me to feel I am alive, in this brief span of Lugh and Candlemas and light we call our life-- for I know I am a winter man; yet why you, when so many sweets might a man eat?

I know not why my heart still rankles with this sting; you have arts in you. You were a jovial sprite, a winsome host to guests, a fire in my bed, a wolven-witted mother to my sons to prick up their minds' inquiries; an emerald in the brooch of any man; and you now love me--so why cannot pluck the past out like a bad string on an old viol?

MIRELDA

We have shared a life in time and place these years under the long forest's loins, and you have clothed and fed and sheltered me {or did until this passion for glory leached out your valor}; yet I am trained to your glove now, for others I would strain and fly. So where-e'r the seat of hate is in your soul, surgeon it out, lest it

spoil the hands of love and amputation of the arms and heart of it might be our fate. Worse than imprisonment and hunger.

AMRIAM

I game you again.
Even as the fire sucks out the heat from chambers, so my heart grows cold.

I will keep your children for another dame and put you back where you belong, once he is slain. Until then you remain with me to punish him. That plain. I would be honest. Here, so I am.
Your stain will ne'er relieved be upon my heart!

MIRELDA

My children steal? (Then should I have kept a lie close to my chest eternal.) You cannot for they are both of us, and to part them from one half would weal their hearts and they would grow up neither one or other but made frail by conflicts' indecision, weakened by their own derision of themselves, and my heart, its candle would melt out.

What is a woman without her young? She is a forest with no leaves, a fishless stream, a worry to ancestors and their ghosts, an end of time, a shallow where no future hosts an arrow to the sun; she is not woman, but a thing undone.

AMRIAM

Caged here like a trapped unicorn for show, a royal stag wicked by their pikes, ignoble bled!
Now I understand those, like unto whom I have become: who serve not the purpose of their time--not mere ambition--but those gifts which nature made us for, imbued of hand and soul, displaced.
I beat my own breast and pace the empty hours.
A man is not a man just by his woman's bed!
But blame and fault may place upon her head!

MIRELDA

(Aside, angrily) One kidnaps, one would steal my flesh; who is the worst?
Cast out, my heart from want of his affection, tears like silk. With silk torn off me will go unclothed, unhousled; with no means to provide for myself, neither the skills of the land nor those of a wandering Marion; without shelter.
Do not banish me thus, I implore you.

AMRIAM

You are my last subject. I am accustomed to rule…

MIRELDA

You demand gentleness from me, as all men demand gentleness from us, but are not gentle; fidelity but are not faithful, forgiveness but do not forgive.
We fear loss of reputation; a single fault condemns us, but for these faults the same men are celebrated as conquerors.

I pay for leisure and privilege with no arts with which to provide for myself protection off land, as lesser born may.
I am a flood of fear and lose my balance.

AMRIAM

Go. I would see thee go now, not wait for Montfort's acts.

MIRELDA

No!

AMRIAM

Make plaint to Montfort for his merciful alms.
In the blizzard the sea has a sound of a white body.
No one in his senses would leave their door. Our jailers are gone to den.

(AMRIAM pushes her out the door, throwing her some robe to cover her).

Love not love.
I would destroy that which within her attracts me most.
Not merely the syrup of her candied flesh, nay, but this open place in her soul which keeps her innocence beyond her bed; for that, if I protect it, makes me weak and cuckolds me.

Scene 3

In the storm

MIRELDA

Fallen then from a bounty of desire. Yet what nature can profusely act, woman, her emissary, cannot. Cannot make winds nor sun nor green earth, nor 'lease and stop the flood. For losing them by loving them, I am banished to the brush where the fox lies near the doe, and no sun penetrates, nor candle ends I tally less than a hall-man doth; and the wind howls like an animal encaged; find comfort in this place and let my life end here. I commend my children to the king. I have no power over any thing.

(Swoons.)

GWNFRITH (coming out of her hovel)

What is this then?

Art something alive?

MIRELDA

Yes I am, and am a mendicant, have come lower than thyself and ask you for a wage of bread and wine and candle ends…

GWNFRITH

Milady! What brings you here??

MIRELDA

…were I to stay here, sheltered, I would serve you in what way I could. Fetch faggots to your fire, that I may warm myself by it, a dog. For I have been brought down.

(She passes out)

Scene 4

May. Mirelda and Baldorf nestled under the roots of an enormous, secluded tree. A dream-like present being immediately distilled into the past. (The Duke de Berry Book of Hours "May" inspires the aesthetic of the scene.) Mirelda and Baldorf have recently finished making love and have just (themselves unseen) watched the May revelers pass by.

MIRELDA

Beltane, the year for me begins and ends.

The innocents take their vows of greenwood marriage, spend the entire night in forests, and now see them adorn the village. Look how Flora they carry in with garlands, past the rowan tree to hang it with extra blossoms from the faerie's glades to make the fertile year festive and possible, seeding the sun to its course.

I hear the dancers' bells. Put we ours on so we may wrap the Maypole in its ribbon dance.

Who will be May's prince and queen?

BALDORF

The guard who, brought to your path steps/ by your husband murderer, followed you in the blizzard, and he and your seneschal brought me to you will be.

I took you here and nursed you from the winter fever, {those feathers which wrapped you in chill} -- into life these months. And now you are warm again, my downy tiercel.

MIRELDA

T'was I who, cast out, came to you for mercy and for the love of youth within in us that Samhain.

And here I have been, as this remembrance will make itself by time's alchemy to ferment inro gold.

BALDORF

Then in this hide, where we may go unclothed as a nightingale in molt, here we may in love be purely unicorns, strew ourselves in petals; and behind the ribbons and heraldic flags beyond where knights may court their ladies, make love as we first did and in this reenactment find our innocence. Make real again the times of desire so long spent in dream.

Here drink and eat with me.

At last you have entwined with me as the harmless vines to this great tree; and I with thee, and know within you what a man may always crave on earth, the nature in a woman here expressed; the shyness of the mink, the insinuation of the fox, the richness of the soil in which the seed will come to harvest, and the world go on.

MIRELDA

In your maleness uncovered is there a god's snare to lay me low, or will it comfort me in sleep for the lees of my life left? There is no sin in this, which church and heretic alike condemn.
These men of churches are envious of contumaciousness itself, for they their own must hide or else have none; and Christ condemns what we have won. Therefore the troubadour is my/ sole priest.
I will keep you, though the time of having in a happiness is long done. Yet to keep you must this war be done.

And for this reason I would return to my castle.

(BALDORF looks at her, wondering. They exit to drink wine and eat in front of the large tree.)

MIRELDA (she continues)

Protected from hunger and Amriam's bruised world, here and there I have with thee lived within the fragrant woodlands by the thin river circled, for many months; where the sword and your friends' thick tables fill with many degrees of peasant and nobility, as you lead them on against oppression.

BALDORF

From under the root of this paternal tree where thou might naiad-like ensconced be to hide, when blind is needed--let me save thee lady from the past; and by my sword defend thee. Freed like the dryad from her bole, here I can rescue you, and soon by justice, bend him to good wood of law, or slay him and release the kingdom from its thrall.
You should revile him who cast you out to die on your own lands.

MIRELDA

His arrogance makes anger in me, and in many ways hate has harvested my memories of him.
Loneliness may stand in well for love, but by seven years' familiarity and by my sons I am still in some ways, his.

BALDORF

I understand. But
As you are in strength recovered, answer me? Whose child is the first born?

MIRELDA

In truth I do not know for sure. Then both of yours as you are brothers in your blood.

BALDORF

And who is it you loved?

MIRELDA

Thee for the youth in me, the spring idolatry of veins green with first love's hope; the singer that thou wert, the warrior defender thou hast become; your prowess.

BALDORF

And my half brother Amriam, not the less?

MIRELDA

He spurns me for the truth; wilt honor me for it?
Then. Yes, the king I grew into as he housled me and kept my fledglings safe; and he knows this. The one is what was dreamt the other is what is and what is done. I love you both. I have said this once before, but your ears were closed.

BALDORF

Mirelda, as I love you and have forgiven my travails in your cause as made more by the king than thee, I would not wrong you by keeping you against your will, though it might fracture the last of my glass heart. This generosity is all the gift I have that it replace the trouble I have gave.

MIRELDA

I will not betray you, your whereabouts; and will take you with me in my heart's grace as a salvation that I had another brief life with thee which I might gain. You do not release me to a better love.

BALDORF

He will misuse you once again.

MIRELDA

I wouldst go solely in hopes my presence would seal up this harried land in peace. That by the life shared by seven years he may have somewhere waxed like myself, and listen to my heart; give up his crown to you, let the manors hold forth collected like rain to a new season; reign justly each by each.

BALDORF

Kingless.

MIRELDA

Whilst you guard him in his keep, his allies sleep under your martial rule. Just though it be, it is unsanctioned as yet and there are those of Amriam's who wait, cert, to upend you.

BALDORF

This kingless limbo is a live liberty; let it stay and come with me, my princess, with my good rebels and the forest free.
{I can reach my chain mail to wear it when needs be; my shield nigh. My hundred ready.}

MIRELDA

Unless pity be multiplied into love for Amriam, I will not stay, but will return.
And will you give me back my sons?

BALDORF

When I have put your husband from his power, by the consensus of his kingdom after time -- this I will. But one may go with you to keep you company, consoled.

MIRELDA

How may I thank thee. I will choose the first born.
Get him his readiness.
The king may not receive me, though I have queried through repentant Gwnfrith as a go between, and he is yielding to it.

BALDORF

There is naught to vouchsafe her treacheries are through.

MIRELDA

I am careful to keep her knowledge very small of that to do with you. She is in my mercy for her life as I in hers. Those bonds 'mongst men make honor where none was.

BALDORF

Women's honor is convenient to their cause.

MIRELDA

Forsooth, we are flawed.
Now, the last words of this King were that he vows to cast me out for good and keep my sons when he has victored you and since his heart changeth like a Fall wind, even if I enter his
house again; he may turn again and do this thing to keep his worst word good.

BALDORF

Then lead me there, and I will (if you decide it, leaving war to a woman's will, a risk my men would say) – end indecision, playing an end to neither war nor peace, to seek attrition in a new rule -- but end by an ignominy or take a victory for good by slaying him; and men have offered me the crown; you will be my Queen and thy boys, mine. We can bay this hound.

MIRELDA

Perhaps returning is ill advised, when I have love and safety here, but a strange pity too sends me to him in his barren state. /And that I might plead with him to end your siege and contemplate a fair council to instate and save this land by law as you would wish. /It is not for myself alone then that I return. Let me save my grace by being an emissary for your justice; and if life ends, it ends by a good deed should he and those who fight for him concede.

BALDORF

If you think to do it, then I will supply you, and good speed.

(Embrace)

MIRELDA

It will be sore to part; as if to go from childhood a second time, worsened by knowing what I leave behind and what awaits.

Amongst the dimpled wayward light halved and dampened by the windy woods, I have gone like the contented wolf, and slept
where birds awaken us upon the moss, the fire circles' stones sanguine with heat and wrapped red flowers about my neck, and followed otters at the lake where the strange moon lacquers o'er the lighted sky with ice which seals out the vulgar sun.

Cold stars shiver and enlarge, congeal the sky; handfuls of constellations adorn us, cleansed and peaceable, wise.

BALDORF

Then why depart?
Why make entry to that past woe when here harmonious we go?
It stirs me ill; the owl's wing across the sun.

MIRELDA

Only the pull of duty's grace it is to me to leave this covert place.

Scene 5

Castle completely empty, moribund.

(Enter):

AMRIAM

This land is in limbo. There is no king. Skirmishes at some of my knights' strongholds prove them weakening, taken by Montfort's peasants.

More galling, they of the Cathar fight now openly with him; private men of wealth (small nobles and merchants too) conjoin against the public wealth of popes and kings.
These "liberant" men rule by council of law, convocations gathered town by town. Sparing my head, to keep a pious semblance in the eyes of all and by giving no iring cause for them, avoid uprisings to avenge my death.

Now she whom I cast out seeks audience.
A messenger from that my rival?

Loneliness may stand in well for love and seal me once again to her, if she would have me.
Were I she, I would seal me down with poison.

Love not love, yet it comes into you and replenishes the pitcher; love beckons me again. Beckons me again. For it may be the last dower of my embarrassed spirit. And shamed as I shamed her, were I to take her back /it would show courage on her part to come.

(Knock on the castle door. He opens it and it is MIRELDA. They embrace tentatively for a long while.
GWNFRITH enters who has come with her.)

AMRIAM

I have said in the past I would have no sight of this one.

MIRELDA

It was she who led me back and was my go between.

AMRIAM

I am grateful, but now let her leave.

GWNFRITH

No, please milord. My sorrows kneel me down. And I wouldst repay you as I betrayed you both once. Take faith in me.

Montfort, Baldorf, has conspired his last, if you but take advantage of his laxness. His camp lies unguarded for he thinks all loyal to him who keep you here.

MIRELDA

My God woman, you should not do this thing! What have you spoiled which I would tell the king?

Wait!

AMRIAM

Then he may be approached if I might gather soldiers, and we could take his camps?

GWNFRITH

I am no military man, but were you to go quick, I wist your men could cut him off from his supplies, and turn on him what he has done to you. Surprise is what will do it.

MIRELDA

Why would you do this thing and by this last betrayal damn yourself to me forever?

GWINFRITH

I am a woman and like the moon have many shapes to my nature, only the sun has no fluxion. My last loyalty is to the King and to his God; I will tell him where to route my brother Hippolyte as well as this Montfort, and all rebellion will be done and the kingdom comforted. So I earn my keep.

MIRELDA

No. You are wrong! Be obedient, stay your mouth that the King may hear MY plea! My husband, stop her mouth and listen only to me.

GWNFRITH

My half-brother Hippolyte, has no ambition in him but forgiveness; he allies with Montfort forgetting God for the worldly humility of an equal law. Thus he betrays both God and King. This ire warms me.

MIRELDA

Your own brother would you violate and aid his fall!

GWNFRITH

My brother is unsanctified!

AMRIAM (to Gwnfrith)

I relinquish now my curse, and will install your son with some inheritance as wants his lineage if I can finish this according to your news. Why came you?

MIRELDA

My Lord, to implore you, if you would take me back, I would be yours. But as you show mercy to one guile-filled woman, show to many innocent. End this war, and let the land recover. Let the council be as Montfort and his Marchers wish. And everyone by Lammas heat when foxes unden might be let to live again!

AMRIAM

Then you came not to be again my Queen, who cast down, hath learned at last the value of her place, but to plead once more again for him? This is the final place of your disloyalty!

MIRELDA

I did not betray you, nor will betray him! I returned for love and reason's sake! See how pity and duty hath befooled me!
Hear: There is joy too from Baldorf; he hath returned our eldest son; no ransom run.

AMRIAM

This is a trick to gain weak mercy from the King to him. I will be the sea in storm to flood him!

GWNFRITH

He keeps a bower in a garden beyond his baron's fortress where he lets down his guard and as the sky may peel back above its lake to show the raw white moon, he revels with a small cortege of men, and you may capture him.

MIRELDA

Like the sun I reflected onto you my hues; befit you with goodness, pretended you; as one does in love of men - I did for my old friend -- and in my pretense dearly pay. I raised you from the ice of death that day and thus do you repay me!

GWNFRITH

Hear then, that the gentler you are to me the more I am distressed and turn unkind, for by that very mercy do you seek to rise above me, condescend!

Laboring I in the smoke of sculleries, or running to and fro at pride's beckoning – having no living save that which is decreed, those low will conspire to be high, or will I, to change places with your life with all my mettle concentrated to an ore; my mortal tinder to flame; for to see you with a life of pleasure, whilst I have naught of it —how it goads me with a loathing. That is the God's truth!

I dissembled, pushing down my envy to an ember, let it light my false smiles. I beguiled myself e'en with gratitude. But why?

Those such as Hippolyte delight in mere equality, common weavers of disdained "right." But, the hard prosper on softness, like oak boles from the rot of mushrooms - more than poor equality our prize; how happy I at last to see you go to ground

decayed as we root within your place and rise. (Biding to leap up from dead logs; I flare to burn you down.)

MIRELDA

Had I a rapier would I halve your moon and send thee to eternal night; thou vilest marsh who mires the brightest day with stinking mud.

I would hack this haggard from her body; this vile lackey—her lacks cannot be filled save by her blood; not in any contentedness; not beauty nor love's satisfaction's, nor a fair soul; send her to death!
You are a murderess!

GWNFRITH

I am the emissary of God's will.

MIRELDA

I am chilled.
I would not change my soul with thee.
Still myself.
May the world forgive me for my maid's folly if there is no way to warn Montfort, nor to undo this thing. Listen to me!

AMRIAM

I will down him as he tends his crops by habit, a weeding in the heat.

MIRELDA

How will you gain men? Our every move is watched! See there folly filled man!

AMRIAM

By falcon. Spare your favorite merlin I have kept well in lieu of thee -- for a messenger, the fast soft colored one.
Here, Still encaged. It only does your bidding. I have tried. Fie, loyal bird!

MIRELDA

I mayn't in good soul give wing to ambush and to murdering!
I have enough sown ash in my conscience of molted regret to send this oft fondled hunter and my pet.

AMRIAM

You will not help me. You are my enemy and when his death is at my door, I will deal with you.

His guardian and his wife of high bridged nose and mien, did sit at table with my father and his queen; the women looked alike though were not kin--my mother marble-ine and the baron's woman heavier set; they were good friends and traded dogs with us, the castle dog, the spaniel often at my foot, is

bred from his. The French hunter who throttles my quails and retrieves them well, a gift, and we returned them with great hounds equipped for boar and hart.

MIRELDA

Why this regalement on the sport of hounds? Lest to breed curs worthy of her.

AMRIAM

I have good wine from the vineyards there. The dogs will gather me my men; for I will set them loose; here is my secret: Nuilly feigning a loyalty to Baldorf, remains to me allegiant. He hath, this Beltane, with obeissant gifts allowed to hostaged me given me hunters, dogs whose noses will lead them back to him when I have need or opportunity. Shrewd, now it is mete.
And dites a moi: Did this my tarnished queen make consort of him with his body?

GWINFRITH

Yes; her infidelities hath mocked thee.

AMRIAM

Bawd, harlot, drab! Thou who returnest to me to ransack me; to trade wits with me thinking to fool me like certain spiders do their mates. How I will devour thee with death!

MIRELDA

My talons locked onto love of both of you like the dead owl on its mouse; even in death the prey will not release. I thought love to make nourishment of; yea at last.
Why then did I think to make reason in this house of chaos!

AMRIAM

I will have you both in hurricane flames of waves.
And flocks of owls guide you to your graves!

{MIRELDA

(to the door to the guard)

Squire! I am Baldorf's page and have him message urgent!

AMRIAM

That horseless, sore-shoed churl heeds you not.
Having played gaming dice with the knave guards and lost good gold to them, they in my favor are obliged and may be pressed to let me walk into the town dressed as one of them. All men may be engaged with promises to change their luck. Turned back what turned on me. Around.
(*Calls in the guard who lingers unssen at the door.)*
Go you with this message to the collar of my dogs and I will give you better gold than any.
(*He writes a message*.)
I will tomorrow by the end of town wait.

GWNFRITH

His camp and men and fortress to the north are. Here is my map.

AMRIAM

To the south thence you and I will tarry till Nuilly comes, and with his men, quietly with a small entourage go elven through the iron and mossy woodland-tangled wolds, lead us you to bold Baldorf by a secret way, and be done cold with him. Vine him, like the trees made dead by bittersweet.

MIRELDA

If Nuilly is thine why hath he not with other men come to thy aid? Baldorf has ten castle towns armed to his beck. Each battle has been his victory. My own father will rally with his earls' fee-held men and more, five fold, should you harm me. He has withheld horses only for my sake. Your King's men have not rallied yet!

AMRIAM

(He waves his head from side to side like a lion with small prey in its mouth.)
They have not come to free me before this because he bluffed them in his assembled forces. My dogs will home them.
(Aside: It is a gambit but I will take it now. This plan.
It needs be quick, lest she trick me to Montfort somehow, or men yet faithful to him in the town, pick up the rumor.)
(To MIRELDA) If you by any breath or hard sign speak of this or seek to eke your way back to him -- no more will I spare thee, but tear the throat from your beak as you once strained the throat of your own bird!
It will delight me to death you when Montfort is slain.
But I will do it now, if thou press me to it. And let you stain my soul immortal with thy sins.
(to GWNFRITH) Keep watch upon this who doth disgrace the very word of wife. I will make good my word to you for her vile seed. As lions riot with their rivals' seed, I will.

(He exits. MIRELDA takes her merlin out of its cage, puts a message to its foot and lets it loose out of a fenestration.)

MIRELDA

By the gods, find Baldorf, warn him and have me saved from the last of my mistakes.

(GWNFRITH tries to catch the bird.)

GWINFRITH

My king! Come.

(Shouting, screaming beyond, off)

MIRELDA

No. Stay! My son; I come.

(GWNFRITH holds her back.)

MIRELDA

I would strike your head down and its snake’s mouth, and let your blood bedazzle me.

(Struggling to get free, she kills GWINFRITH by her own rapier. As she is stunned over the dead body:)

AMRIAM

(returns with the bloody clothing of her son)

Done.

Here is your line dismembered from itself.

Scene 6

MIRELDA in the castle paces the floor. Sunset.
AMRIAM enters.

MIRELDA

(to the bloody shirt)

Yes ottery pup, your mother will come in anon and bring you candles and an angel's song. Would it were Yule again and midnight mass, the angels' mass would see the wickless night before the Shepard's songs brings up the matins. It is the singing I would hear, and see stained glass and sculpture, not the God. Rather the mingling of men may come together and somehow mend what has been lost or make the truth from what is false. Couldst believe the power of this resuscitation?

(Enter AMRIAM)

AMRIAM

I am returned.

MIRELDA

What then is the outcome!

AMRIAM

He doth live no more.

MIRELDA (turns away)

Then bring a fate down to seal this fearful day which may bring on a plague to run its ruination.

AMRIAM

What choice had I but rich victory? I rise ring-ed in archangels' light re-kinged.

MIRELDA

What then, he who slays his own son and jails its mother for the sake of harlot's lines?

AMRIAM

We took my horses freshest, riding hard, and to his camp, which is before the marches where my barons jailed are, he was alone. Only a few rebels by him.
We did encircle him, and he surprised and weary fought us well.
And then as he was mortal in blessure, he asked a favor; took his lute and sang…

MIRELDA

What
sing?

AMRIAM

"Wrong not dear empress of my heart the merits of true passion…"
(This is a real medieval song, AMRIAM sings a piece of it)

And he said, he never did song write for you, for his love was too strong a thing to contempt you by his confusion in a legend which would last well past him.
No song, he said, could put a justice to your beauty.
And then, he died.

And now, perhaps we prophesy. Those men who want his parliament come on. I hear their horses rupture the pathless woods with hooves. Listen.

MIRELDA

And I? Wilt slay me now? Let me lie with my son's poor limp limbs, just to see him and slay me and bury us!
Oh, let my other child live and I will brave death's exile, having tasted it, but every day in all my flesh decayed, my spirit desires my babes as grapes may wish for vines. And my raptured wine will be poured no more. No nunnery for me, but ministering to the poor the alms of my estate so paltry as are left, give out.
{Assart not the flagrant forest for fields but save its sanctuary for poachers.}
Assure my grieving father of one heir at least to make up for his daughter's encroaching evils.
Dead are my dreamings, as dead my bairn; gone is the future of my loins;
discontented to the end of days, love desserts me as good fame of graciousness,
which both, with my soul bled out, are fled; my life and goodness now used up;
poured out in woe's misfortunate acts. I am naught but harsh become; my beauty
turned to hatred's ash, and I have learned in life that naught serves fate in truth
but falsehood and disaster.

AMRIAM

I vowed to slay thee and be done with this polyphony, and smash the rebec and the lute and hear no more the wind, nor doubt endure which keeps me to the sleepless moon.

MIRELDA

Then do it. Thou should have made of life what it doth give, and not contort it
to try with thy might to make your will defy each mote of fate and supersede all men.
Accept. The death of Baldorf is the final one. For he was good, and had returned my other son. *(Weeping*)

{And you whom I did also love are poor of heart, a barren moor of it; yet hoped I for your change before, for in the love of me, I thought you might find kindness (though t'is now lost in me; who sought it once.) But in your eyes
my double love indecent was:
I nay could be / a grail to lead thee. Then was I chastity itself in all my sins, compared to these mine now.}
I am weary of my time, my vain joys are done; I care not never what happens to this flesh.

AMRIAM

As am I too.

MIRELDA

It is a shame to die in new summer, when by the first regalement of sun, feeling itself embellished, stronger by the day to flex, none but the meanest would harm the world, and any who live would see the glory in the farmer's way. He loved his land, and from it found his justice. At least had that. He will find peace in it.
My son had no land lived, nor known a choice of way.
Now let me sever with you and go to him while I am brave by futile loss and stain. A mother for his spirit, in spirit paired, remain.
(She gives her neck to his sword)

AMRIAM

I will put down this sword, and slay you not.

MIRELDA

What say you? What strangeness now envelops you, who are always two; in the high wind of your victory the sky clears not but fills with charred stains to club the stubbed moon? You enter as a skylark, exit as the croaking crooked rook.
We strain for goodness and in the instance as wings roll in flight to land, one act, one grievous thing negates the rest of living and mouse is taken by the owl; we land and fold our wings in blood.
Harassed by hawks for years at last the owl reacts and kills the interfering rival, carrying by its claw, the head.

AMRIAM

Perhaps I have mistook my own fate.
(aside: How strange to find that I did love my rival as a brother after the man is gone.)
The death of this a son gone replaces him with mercy for his fathers. All men are brothers to the helpless young; all brothers fathers… too late known.
Here, take my words for swords and make a truce. Take this my belt and bury here my time, and let me make amends for all the deaths before the light begins to fade.
I will shrive thee of thy murder if you shrive me of
The death of sons; what mad-mired envy cast me so
out of the seat and girth of well horsed reason?

Light the candles and be done with this -- e'en my kingdom for its vainglory.
At last I look about and see my lands made barren by my acts of war, these halls discolored, dour, no feast, nor troubadours.
And winning, I have lost my soul complete lest I do right at last.

(Taking a quill and parchment to write.)

AMRIAM

I do commend my living to kingship only in a council; appoint a steward in my place. Do thou what thou wilt. And I wilst wander in the lands a mendicant until I see what nature truly plans for men.

And if you'd come with me, I'd spurn you not, but try to be as Montfort was, just, but more a loving man become until my death repent the death of living flesh I slew.
For I have learned by these past years of trial,
Through time and lands these things remain:
That men who are dissatisfied will cause each other pain.

(Wind is fierce as storm brews)

MIRELDA

It is hell's hounds' horrors which yell. What howls about us now's the hawking wind, in this bleak hall which victory hath won but is impoverished thereby.
Let us know then our mortality you and I, that out the walls, hunger, poverty and wounds / stream amongst this rain; and learning them, let men cling together to survive.
Or cold aloneness be our bowl of death.
So little time for pleasure in our mortal second; why /must men make of endless strife and want the world?
Better it would have been to end suffering and enjoy each other's company while we had time. But time for us is done.

AMRIAM

To all men the same, for these agues bind kings to subjects in the end.
I would, were I a king again, have my son and brother to the living rise, and give then mercy out to every man.

(Sound of storm, and of nearing horses; an angry knocking on the gate.)

THE END OF PLAY